MASTERED MEN

F. A. ROBINSON

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F. A. ROBINSON, B.A.

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

REV. CHARLES W. GORDON
(RALPH CONNOR)

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INTRODUCTION

This book has this virtue among others, that it is a true rescript of events that have happened in the author's personal experience. It is made up of human documents that deal with matters of surpassing interest. The book tells in simple and vivid style the story, always fascinating and thrilling, of the triumph of the Gospel in the souls of men. It is a heartening book and a moving. It will bring courage and hope to those who read it, and awaken in their hearts a deeper passion to share in God's great mission to men.

The new west is full of the broken driftwood of humanity, showing the marks of the attrition of time and conflict and defeat—good stuff it is, but waste and lost. This book tells of its salvage to the infinite joy of men, and to the glory of God.

The author has the further distinction of having seen himself a large part of the events he describes.

The book will do good wherever it goes.

Charles W. Gordon
(ralph connor)

Winnipeg, Canada.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

"Mastered Men" is a new edition of "Trial-Tales of Western Canada," containing the material of the original volume with additional sketches. The new title has been chosen as being more significant of the underlying theme of the book.

F. A. R.

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MASTERED MEN

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CHAPTER I

OLD KEN'S ROUND-UP

Old Ken was "down on his luck." For well-nigh fifty years he had "gone the pace" in a district where certain men say glibly, "there's no God west of the Rockies." The old prospector had been, according to those who knew him best, in one of three conditions for some years. He was either "getting drunk, drunk, or sobering up." And yet in spite of his weakness and sin, and in spite of the curses he got, there was no more popular man in the whole camp than Old Ken, although likely he was not conscious of it. One of the miners had once expressed a conviction about Ken that was dangerously popular. It was at the time Frank Stacey's mother died, in the East, and Frank had not "two bits" to his credit. As might have been expected, it was Old Ken who started the hat to wire that Frank was leaving on the next train, and to see that he had "enough of the needful to do the decent thing." "It's his last chance, boys," said Ken, as he made the rounds during the noon hour. "I got twenty-two dollars since eleven o'clock, so I guess, with what you fellers is a-going to do, the old camp's on the job, as usual, when a chap like Frank wants to pay his last respects." There was some mystery about those twenty-two dollars until Andy the bartender told how Old Ken had "got it out of the boss" on the solemn promise that for two weeks he would "work like a Texas steer" without touching a cent until the debt of thirty dollars, minus eight for board, was discharged. Then it was that one of the boys expressed himself thus about Ken: "By gosh, fellers, he's white clear through, that same old soak is, when there's any trouble on. He's a pile decenter than his thirsty old carcase'll let him be."

On a particular morning some months ago the old prospector stood at the little station a mile or so away from the camp centre. The "mixed" was winding her way slowly around the curves of the summit of the Rockies. From the windows of the solitary passenger car a young man looked somewhat anxiously across the valley below. A few shacks nestled among the poplar brush, and in the distance an unpainted building stood, with distinct outline, towering against the dark background of the mountain range opposite. The young man knew well enough, from his work among the miners and loggers, that yonder building was as a moral cancer eating out the best life of the community. The outlook was not bright, but he was on the King's Business, and he knew that he had in his care the mightiest thing, and the greatest remedy, the world knows of.

Alone he stepped off the train, and being the only arrival he received the entire benefit of Old Ken's curious but not unfriendly gaze. The new-comer, who was conducting special services at selected mining and lumbering camps that were considered especially needy, looked around for a district missionary who was expected to act as his pilot for a few days. No one but Old Ken and the station agent were in sight, so after friendly greetings to the former the young preacher made known the purpose of his visit. Old Ken listened courteously. "Well, stranger, you've hit the right spot all right; we kin stand the gospel in big doses here for sure; most of us is whiskey soaks or bums, and some of us is both. I wish you luck, partner, but I'm feared most of us is incurable. Yes, partner, I'm feared you've come too late, too late."

The Frenchman who was hotel-keeper, professional gambler, lumberman and mine-owner, was not enthusiastic about allowing the sky-pilot to board in his notorious hotel and gambling den, but eventually accommodation was secured.

The dance-hall was procured for the services, and Ken volunteered the information that the preacher wouldn't likely be disturbed, because there were only four women left in the camp, and he added, "two of 'em can dance like elephants and one's got ingrowing toe-nails or something else, so there's only one on duty, and that ain't enough variety for a good hop."

A few days after the services commenced, Old Ken managed to replenish his treasury by the fortunate desire on the part of two men to get a haircut. The old man boasted that he knew how to do most things. "I'm never idle, preacher," he said with a wink; "when I ain't doing something I'm a-doing nothin', so I'm always a-doing something you see."

No sooner were the locks shorn than the old man made his way to the bar-room. He was emerging from his favourite haunt when the preacher met him. " 'Tain't no use pretending I'm what I ain't, preacher," he said after a few minutes' conversation. "I'm an old fool and I know it, but what does it matter? Who cares?"

"It matters a good deal to you, Ken," the preacher replied quietly, "and there are some of us who care. Ken, if you would give God as big a place in your life as you've given whiskey there wouldn't be room for the things that have made you call yourself an old fool. I know He could make a mighty good man of you, Ken."

"Thank you kindly, preacher, but you don't know me: I'm the hardest old guy in this country; the fellers around here think they can go it some, but let 'em all get as full as they kin hold and I'll take as much as any one of 'em and then put twelve glasses more on top of that to keep it kind of settled, and then pile the whole gang under the table and walk out like a gentleman. Yes, sir, I kin do it; and if a feller's as big as a house I'll whittle him down to my size and lick him. Yer intentions are good, partner, but you're about fifty years late on this job."

The days allotted to the mission were rapidly passing away, and while not a few had given evidence of seeing "the vision splendid," there were some after whom "the little preacher," as he had come to be generally spoken of in the camp, greatly longed.

Coming down the stairs one day he saw Old Ken standing with his back to the stair rail. Putting his hand on the old man's shoulder he entered into conversation.

"Ken, you haven't been to one of the services yet, and I want you to come to-night."

"Lord bless you, preacher, if I went to a religious meeting the roof 'ud fall in for sure, and I don't want to bust up the dance-hall."

But the little preacher was not in a mood to be "jollied" that day. "Ken," he continued, "I'd like you to give God a chance. Do you know, I like the look of you, and——"

The old prospector cut the sentence short, straightened up, and gazed appreciatively into the speaker's eyes. "What's that you said, preacher? What's that you said? You like the look o' me! Well, siree, that's the decentest thing that's been said to me in thirty years! Yes, sir, it is: I'm treated like a yaller dog around here; but you speak decently to a yaller dog, he'll wag his tail. He likes it, you know. Say, preacher, when you need me just you whistle and I'm on the job!"

"I take your offer, old man," said the preacher. "I've been here for some time and I've heard a good deal that I didn't want to hear. Some of you fellows have been cursing pretty nearly day and night since I came. I didn't want to hear it, but I couldn't get away from it. I've heard the boys; it's only fair they should hear me. Ken, you round them up and bring them to the dance-hall."

Ken's hand was extended. "Here's my hand on it, preacher; I'm yer man. If the boys ain't there you'll see my head in a sling in the morning."

At 7:30 Ken organized himself into an Invitation Committee. There were rumours that he even brushed his coat. At any rate, at 7:45 he stood at the door of the gambling den, and with an air of unusual importance he succeeded in getting silence long enough to tell "the boys" that there was "a religious show on in the dance-hall." "The procession will form in ten minutes," he continued, "and every —— man in this place has got to be in it." A few laughed; some cursed at the interruption, and others were so engrossed in their game that they appeared not to have heard.

In a few minutes Ken entered the bar-room and started his round-up. After telling one or two quietly that it was "up to him" to get the boys to the religious show, he made his proclamation. "Come out of this, you —— fellers, and come up to the —— dance-hall and give the —— little preacher a —— fair show, or I'll kick the —— hide off you." The writer has no apology to make for blasphemy either in the East or West, but like classical music, to some ears, Old Ken's blasphemous language was not so bad as it sounded.

After the old man had brought into use all his remarkable reserve of Western mining camp vocabulary, there was only one man besides the bar-tender who failed to join the procession.

The services had become well advertised throughout the entire district by this time, so that when Old Ken arrived with his company the little hall was fairly well filled. But the old man was "going to see this thing through," and so, despite the protestations that almost upset the gravity of the preacher conducting the preliminary song service, the gang was coaxed and forced to the front seats. Ken directed the seating operations in a way that suggested his ownership of the entire place. In a stage whisper he instructed the boys to "get a squint at the preacher's hair." With pride he continued, "mighty good cut that, I performed the operation this afternoon."

At the close of the service he came to the platform. "Say, preacher, that was a great bunch. There ain't a —— (excuse me, preacher, I forgot you don't swear), but say, there ain't a man of 'em but's done time. I'll tell you, preacher, we'll run this show together. I'll round 'em up and you hit 'em"; then with a swing of his big arm he added, "and hit 'em hard. See here, preacher, you take a tip from me; us old sinners don't want to listen to none of yer stroke-'em-down-easy preachers; we wants a feller what'll tell us we're d—— fools to be hoodwinked by hitting the pace, and what'll help us to get up after he shows us we're down."

A few nights later the preacher had Ken's "bunch" particularly in view as he delivered his message. Near the close he asked during one of those times of reverent silence that may be felt but not described: "Are not some of you men tired of going the pace? You know it doesn't pay. Many a time you curse yourselves for being fools, and yet you go back to the old ways that blast your life. Men! God knows how some of you are tempted, and He is ready to help. His Son came into the world to save sinners. He stood in the face of the fiercest temptations, and with the command of a conqueror He said, 'Get thee behind Me.' And, Men! He is ready to stand alongside of every passion-torn man to-day and to help him to overcome. Isn't there some man here to-night who wants to do the decent thing, and who will accept His offer of help in the biggest fight any man has?"

The words were simple and commonplace enough, but the One who uses stumbling lips was present that night. Unexpectedly one man arose, pulling himself up by the back of the seat in front of him—a sin-marred man, trembling as a result of daily dissipation—and said in a muffled voice, "I want to do the decent." A confirmed gambler not far away stood up and merely said, "Me too, Bob." Another, in a tone of despair, cried, "God and me knows there's nothing in this kind of life! Oh the d——, d—— whiskey, it's ruined me." Late into the night the preacher walked along the trail with one of these sin-wrecked men; but the transformation of that life and other lives must constitute a separate story.

A few days before the mission closed Old Ken came to the preacher and announced his intended departure from the camp. "You see, stranger, the camp's pretty quiet, and I ain't a-making enough money to buy a dress for a humming-bird. I ain't got the wherewithal for a ticket, but if I strike the right kind of conductor I guess I'll make the grade. You see they can't put a feller off between stations in this country. So I'll get one station along anyway, and if they chuck me off I'll wait for the next train, and a few chucks and I'll get to N—— anyway."

The following morning prospector and preacher walked together down the railway track to the little station. A farewell word was spoken, and a farewell token slipped into the big hard hand. Old Ken stood a moment or two on the steps of the car. There was a far-away look in the old man's eyes as he gazed in the direction of the distant Cascade range. "Good-bye, preacher. Yes, maybe, maybe we'll strike the main trail that leads home. I hope so—God knows—maybe it ain't too late for me yet. I kinder think lately that God wants Old Ken. Good-bye, preacher; God bless you."

Three months later "the little preacher" received a letter from a British Columbia miner. One paragraph may be quoted here: "Poor old Ken was burned to death in a hotel fire in S—— three weeks ago. He was the kindest old man I ever met, and as long as I live I shall thank God for the night he rounded us up and brought us to your meeting in the dance-hall."

CHAPTER II

CHARL

When Charlie Rayson passed out of the dance-hall in the little mountain mining town a few nights after Old Ken's round-up, he was on the border-line between despair and hope. Was there any chance? For years he had apparently worked with the logging gang only that he might give full rein to the lusts that devoured him; and if he remained in the bush the whole winter it was with an impatience for the days to pass so that the spring might bring him to the bar-rooms and dens of vice, where the awful monotony might be relieved in a spring-long spree. Nobody had any particular interest in Charlie, and no one knew from whence he came.

And yet there seemed to be some slight ray of hope to-night. He had listened for the first time since boyhood to the pearl of the parables, and then Old Ken had asked the preacher to "sing that there Wandering Boy piece." Charlie knew not if his mother still lived, but the words, "Oh! could I see you now, my boy, as fair as in olden times," came like his mother's call through the sin-stained past. For thirteen years he had cut himself entirely off, so far as his whereabouts was concerned, from that one who had never ceased to love him.

In a few minutes after the close of the service Charlie and the preacher were alone on the mountain trail. Suddenly Charlie stopped and said, "Good God, preacher, you can't, you don't understand what I'm up against. For nineteen years I've been in the hands of either the doctor or the policeman—my passions rip me to pieces—men can't help me; I wonder if God can? I want to believe what you said to-night is true, but I've always wanted to do the thing that damns me, worse than I have wanted to do anything else, and yet I never do it without something saying 'don't.' "

In the silence of the lonely hills the two men stood, while one asked Him who is the Help of the helpless to be the Refuge of the passion-pursued man. Poor Charlie could utter but few words: "God, oh, God," he sobbed, "I'm like that prodigal, and I'm sick of it all. Oh, God, can you help me? I want to see my old mother." With the mention of the word mother the man burst into a passion of weeping. For several minutes no word was uttered, as the preacher steadied the trembling man. It was no easy task for Charlie to do what he was counselled to do after he had made the Great Decision. But that night he read, from the Testament given him, a portion of the third chapter of St. John's Gospel, and knelt by his bunk and asked for strength sufficient. To kneel down and pray in certain Western mining camp bunk-houses is a man's job, but Charlie had realized that only One was able to deliver from the passions that rend, and to that One he appealed.

A fortnight later an old woman in a far-away Ontario village received a letter bearing a British Columbia postmark. She was a poor, lonely, half-crippled individual, but the message of that letter enriched and cheered her and quickened her footsteps as nothing had done in years. To everybody she knew, and to a good many people she did not know, she told of her new joy. In her trembling old hands she held the precious letter. "Do you know, I've got a letter from my Charl. I thought he was dead. I haven't heard from him in thirteen years, but he's in British Columbia, and he says he's a Christian man now, and he wants to see his mother—and he's going to save up so's he can come home, and till he comes he's going to write every week—and he sent me some money. Oh, how good God is to give me back my Charl!" The poor old soul seemed raised as if by a miracle from her invalidism.

Charlie toiled on in the logging gang, and when pay-day came the hotel-keeper reaped the usual harvest from most of the men, and was hoping that Charlie and Bill Davis, two of his best customers, would be coaxed back to their old habits. Bill had been known as the "little devil" of Primeau's gang, and his professed change of heart was a thing incredible to the entire community. But Charlie and Bill had been a good deal together of late, and the latter had told Charlie all he purposed to do and be with God's help, and so the two men became mutually helpful.

Five months passed, and besides having purchased new clothes, Charlie Rayson had one hundred and fifty dollars in the savings bank at Brandon Falls.

And so at last the home journey was to be made. It would be hard to say who was the more excited, Charlie or his loyal friend Bill Davis. For some time Bill thought he would "pull out" when Charlie went, but later he decided to stay on his job a few months longer. Nothing would do but that Charlie should take "just a little remembrance" of twenty-five dollars from Bill to the aged mother.

On Saturday afternoon the final arrangements were made, and Bill did a score of things to make Charlie's get-away easier and pleasanter.

While Bill was purchasing a few little necessities at the company store, Charlie stepped across the threshold of the bar-room for the first time in months. He wanted to say good-bye to Andy the bar-tender. A number of Charlie's old pals were sitting or lounging around, some of them well on the way to their terrible monthly debauch. Numerous hands were extended and not a few glasses offered to Charlie. "Not for me, boys—I've cut it out for good, thanks all the same," was Charlie's firm response.

"Oh, come off," cried one, "you ain't a-going back on your old pals just 'cause you've got a new suit o' clothes."

Numerous sallies followed this, but to each one Charlie gave a similar reply, and backed towards the door. It has always been supposed that it was Primeau himself who tripped Charlie, but be that as it may, somehow Charlie stumbled backwards to the bar-room floor; and when Bill Davis was returning through the hall some of the men were holding Charlie while others were pouring whiskey through his lips, "just to give him a lesson in sociability." Bill Davis could scarcely believe that the boys had tried to make Charlie drink, but when he realized what had happened, his indignation prompted the profanity that had become a life habit. He checked the words, however, and shouted at the scoffing group to leave Charlie alone or somebody would get a headache. There was a laugh from one and a muttered "mind your own d—— business" from another. And then Bill took a hand in the affair.

The following day the affray was being generally discussed. One or two men who were participants in it were careful to keep out of the public gaze. Bill had not selected places where they should fall when he was defending Charlie. To a little group in the bar-room Andy gave the information that "There was something doing all right, when Bill started in to look after Charlie. Say! the feathers was a-flying. Bill ain't such a blamed good Christian that he's forgot how to fight."

The taste of whiskey had aroused the old craving in Charlie, and long after the east-bound train had pulled out he was fighting his battle with Bill by his side.

Never had the two men felt more alone, and never had they more needed a friend than now. All Charlie's confidence in his ability to stand firm seemed to be shaken. "Bill!" he said, "I swallowed some, and it seems like it was running all through me to find some more to keep it company. Bill! for God's sake don't leave me. I feel as if I was going to lose the game."

Bill hardly knew what to say or do. The fight in Charlie's behalf and the disappointment over the delayed journey had left a great depression. Neither of the men went down to the evening meal. To pass the bar-room door and to face the men again seemed more than Charlie dare undertake.

The next train for the East passed through at 3 a.m., and after thinking over the events of the afternoon, Bill made up his mind that they would flag Number 56, and that he would journey a hundred miles or so with his sorely-tempted chum. In the darkness of midnight, the two men passed quietly out of the building and along the trail to the railway station.

At last they were really on the train, and having found an empty double seat the men made themselves as comfortable as possible, and were soon, like their fellow-passengers, getting such fitful sleep as one may obtain on the average "local."

It was the season of the year when "washouts" make journeying dangerous, and frequently in Western Canada trains are delayed many hours, and sometimes days, by the swelling of the mountain streams which in their onward rush sometimes carry culverts and ballast from beneath ties and track.

The train had pulled out of Sinclair, and was making her usual time through the eastern section of the Pass, when passengers were suddenly thrown from their seats by a terrific jolt. Lamp glasses crashed to the aisle, and baggage was dislodged from the racks. Charlie pulled himself to his feet almost instantaneously, despite the knocks he had received. The lamps were flickering and smoking, but fortunately there appeared no danger of fire. The brakeman, hatless and with a bleeding face, came rushing through the cars seeking to allay the fears. "Stay in the cars, please—there's no danger of fire. You're better here than outside. Doctors will be here soon."

Bill had not escaped serious injury. He found it impossible to rise, and as tenderly as he knew how, Charlie pillowed his head and stooped beside him as he lay in the aisle. "I'm feared I'm pretty badly hurted, pardner," groaned Bill. "There was something kind o' crushed inside. Guess I'll just lie here for a bit."

The engine had plunged through an undermined piece of track, and engineer and fireman were terribly cut and scalded, while the baggageman had been pinned beneath some heavy trunks that had shot forward and downward when the engine crashed into the washout.

"It's the hospital for you, my man," said the doctor kindly, after a hurried examination of Bill's injuries. "We'll make you as comfortable as we can before the 'special' pulls out, but you need a little attention that you can't get in the camp even if you were able to stand the journey."

Charlie got permission to accompany his pal, and for Bill's sake he kept a brave heart, although the events of the past twenty-four hours robbed him of the lightheartedness that had been his in anticipation of the home-going.

Two days later Charlie decided to continue his journey eastward. The doctors were still anxious about Bill, but there was nothing Charlie could do, and he knew the old mother was waiting for her boy.

It was a touching farewell as the sick man's hand was clasped. A score of times Charlie had expressed his sorrow that he had ever let Bill accompany him, and yet each time in his own way he thanked Bill for standing by him when he was "near bowled out."

Bill tried to say that he was glad Charlie was going home, but his tone and look revealed his sense of loss and loneliness at the prospect of his pal's departure, and Charlie's eyes needed a good deal of attention, which they received surreptitiously.

Motioning for Charlie to come nearer, the sick man whispered: "You're a brick, old pard, to stay by me this long. I guess she's getting anxious for yer. Say, Charlie, when yer away down there I'll be kind er lonely; how would it be if yer made a bit of a prayer once in a while for me?" Then with a last pressure on the still clasped hand, he added, "Good-bye, old pal, God bless yer; maybe we'll hit the trail together again some day, but say, Charlie!" (the voice was throbbing with emotion, and the eyes reflected well-nigh a mother's tenderness)—"say, Charlie! we'll stay by it, won't we? If the whole world goes back on Jesus Christ we two'll stick to Him, 'cause we know what He can do; don't we, Charlie?"

Thus they parted. Inside of three days the one was clasped in a mother's arms and there was great joy in the little village home; and almost at the same hour the other reached his Father's Home, and there, too, was great joy.

CHAPTER III

THE BANNER MINES

Charlie Rayson was the man who first suggested the holding of special services at the "Banner." "Oh! boys, but it's a hard spot. I mind when Old Ken hit the trail to get a job there. Somebody brought word they was paying six bits an hour for rough carpentering, and next morning Ken took over the mountain with his pack. He never stopped even long enough to get on a spree. In about a week he was back at the old spot. That night he was in the barroom telling the boys about his trip. I mind he told 'em they could judge what it was like when he was 'the only gentleman in the place.'" Those who knew Ken needed no further report of conditions at the Banner Mines.

When the District Superintendent heard that the men were planning to go to the "Banner," he wrote to tell them not to be too much discouraged if it took a week's hard work to get half a dozen hearers. "The spot is known to many as the 'hell-hole of the Province,' and the Church does not begin to figure in importance with the corner grocery, but with two special workers and the amount of earnest prayer that is everywhere being offered, I am hopeful that the heartrending indifference may be overcome."

And so on a certain Monday morning the missioners made their way to the Junction, and then took the dirty work-train up the gulch to the camp. In a community where men have for years read anti-church, anti-religious literature, and where "parasite" is hissed under the breath every time a minister of the Gospel is seen, it could scarcely be expected that anything approaching a welcome would be given the newcomers.

Inside of an hour the work of getting acquainted was commenced. On the trail, along the railway track, at the tipple, at the entrance to the mines, in the wash-room, wherever men could be met, the missioners sought to enter into conversation with the miners. Some answered civilly, a few were almost cordial, many were surly, and many others either absolutely indifferent and silent, or openly antagonistic.

Dave Clements, a disabled miner, who looked after the wash-room, expressed himself thus: "Religion ain't no good here; most of the mine-owners is supposed to hev got it, and so the rest of us don't want it. Look at the houses what they make us live in—my missus has been sick most all winter—jest frozen, that's why! We pays eighteen dollars a month for the —— places. The company owns everything around here: land, houses, stores, train—even the air belongs to 'em, 'cause it's full of their coal-dust. We has to pay about three times the proper price for things; but, then, that's what helps 'em to be religious; that's what gives 'em the front seats in the synagogue, you bet; we fellers sweat to buy church organs and plush cushions, and then the parasite parsons pat the mine-owners on the pate and give thanks for such generous brethren. If anybody needs revivalling, stranger, it's that gang of hypocrites back yonder what makes us poor devils raise the wind to blow their glory trumpets." Yet even Dave was compelled to say of Him whom the missioners sought to exalt, "I find no fault in this man."

In response to an invitation to attend an evening service one miner replied: "Meeting, eh? Any booze going? No? Any dance after? Something better than that? Gee! it must be swell!" Then the tone was contemptuous: "No, siree; you couldn't get me into a religious meeting with a couple of C.P.R. engines."

Yet the daily conversations and invitations were not all in vain, for when there is a real concern on the part of Christians for non-

Christians, that concern is likely to be imparted to those whom they seek to win.

Moses Evans, a Welsh miner, listened somewhat impatiently to the missioner's words, as he stood leaning against a telephone pole. Then with apparent weariness he answered, "Look here, young fellow, there ain't a —— man in this country can live a Christian life in this camp. I've tried it; you ain't. I know; you don't. I used to be a Christian in Wales—leastwise, I think I was—but you can't be here." The interview ended, however, with a promise on Moses' part to be present on the following night. Three nights later he knelt, at the close of the service, behind the old piano, and brokenly asked God to make him "different again." "Forgive my sins," he continued, "and help me like You did in Wales."

Near the end of the week the missioners planned to hold an open-air service a mile and a half down the gulch, at a spot called "Spanish Camp," where nearly two hundred miners lived. It was hoped that by arranging the meeting between "shifts" a number might hear the Gospel message, who had not previously been reached. Every tent and shack was visited twice preceding the meeting, and hand-printed signs were posted wherever likely to arrest attention. At the time for the meeting to commence there were five children and eight dogs present. It was not a "dignified" course to pursue, and probably merited the disapproval of the "church fathers," but one of the missioners, yearning to get a hearing for his message, got possession of a large tin can from a nearby rubbish heap, and with the aid of a club succeeded in getting considerable noise from its emptiness. The people may have appreciated his advertising ability, or it may be they preferred to hear the Gospel rather than the noise that was coming from the tin can; but, at any rate, in a few minutes a circle of thirty or forty gathered around the speakers.

A few minutes after the meeting had commenced the limping figure of Moses Evans might have been seen on the mountain-side near No. 3 Mine. Hurrying down the trail he crossed the rustic bridge over the little mountain stream, and came to where the crowd had gathered. Without any hesitation he pushed through the circle and stood in the centre. Reverently removing his miner's cap, he said, "I'd like to pray." A few faces expressed a sneer, but Moses clasped his hands and uttered his petition, which was written down immediately thereafter. "Oh, God, you know as how the devil has been at me all day, saying as I dasn't stand out in the public air and confess Thee. You know, oh, my God! that I want to be a good man again. You know I can't read nor write in English, but You've put words in my mouth; put them into my heart, and keep it clean, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Moses Evans and other men, who with him made open confession of Jesus Christ, were again and again spat upon and cursed, as they passed along the "entry" at their daily toil in the mine. "But it's a great thing," wrote the school-teacher, "that these men can be by tongue damned higher and damned lower than anything else in this world, and yet stand firm. Increase the number of such men, and you have a leaven of righteousness that will eventually permeate this whole mining community. This is our only hope of rescue from the mire of sensuality and vice into which many of our miners have sunk. Moses says to please tell you that the words of the hymn you used to sing are true in his own experience:—

'Through days of toil, when heart doth fail
God will take care of you;
When dangers fierce your path assail,
God will take care of you.' "

CHAPTER IV

THE "HOP"

It was the acceptance of the challenge to attend the "Hop" at the Bonanza Camp that popularized the services at the Banner Mines.

After the open-air meeting a number of men lounged around one of the shacks discussing the question of religion. When one of the preachers approached the group to invite them to the meeting in the Hall, "Smut" Ludlow at once began to air his grievances against the Church, and to inform the preacher that there were "more —— rascals in the Church than in any other organization on earth." Then Frank Stacy contributed his bit of condemnation: "See here, preacher! The last time I was back East, I thought I'd see what sort of a show they was still running in yer House o' God, and so I went in. Just over the archway inside was a fine piece of writing, something about 'the rich and the poor meeting together, and going snooks.' I thought it sounded pretty good, so I made myself as comfortable as I could in one of them soft seats. After a while some dude started to play the organ, and folks dressed up fit to kill strutted into their seats and bobbed their heads down and pretended to say their prayers. Then I watched an old guy trying to get his overcoat off: I mind how his other coat well-nigh come off with it; he sure was scared when he saw his shirt sleeve, and he hustled both his coats on again like he'd been caught stealing. Just then somebody tapped me on the shoulder, and a coon with a silk tile in his hand told me to sit at the back where the seats weren't rented. I went back looking like a fool, but you bet I didn't stop for a back seat: I decided I'd take an outside berth, and it'll be a few hundred years before this chicken gets caught again. Rich and poor meet together, and go snooks! It looked like it, didn't it? See here, preacher, ain't it about time you fellers stopped talking one thing and serving up another? The whole thing is tommy-rot, that's what I say."

Hal Rinnell was not antagonistic, but objected to an illustration that the preacher had used. "Say, preacher, warn't that there story about the Bishop and the silver candlesticks a bit fishy? You mind you said about the feller swiping 'em after the Bishop had give him a bed, and then he got away with 'em through the night; and when the p'liceman saw him with 'em next morning, and know'd they belonged to the Bishop, they jest nabbed him and brought him back.

And you mind you said the Bishop told 'em the man didn't swipe the candlesticks, but got 'em from him as a present. Then when the p'lice was gone, the Bishop called the thief 'brother,' and made him keep his haul and promise to be square from that on. Now that ain't reasonable: it ain't human nature. I'd like to see the pumpkin-head what would swipe my candlesticks, if I had any, arter I'd give him a decent bed. He'd hev his next breakfast in Hades, you bet. Some o' you preachers ain't reasonable; you kinder get yer wires crossed."

The cross-firing ended by a proposition from "Smut." "There's going to be a hot old time to-morrow night at the Bonanza, preacher. I'll make a deal with you. You don't like our style; we don't like your hot air. You attend the ball at Bonanza, we'll attend your show, providing you start when we start, and leave when we leave, and get home as soon as we do. How's that, boys?" The "boys" trusted Smut's judgment, and knew by his wink that the proposition was safe, hence their unanimity to make it a "go." None of them dreamed that the proposal would be accepted, but after a moment's conference with his fellow-worker the preacher agreed; and in order that there should be no misunderstanding, he repeated Smut's proposition.

The following evening the six-mile walk to the Bonanza was commenced, and the second party to the contract followed the leaders. The first mile of trail was familiar to the preacher, then the way led over rarely-travelled paths. Carefully he took his bearings when that was possible, for few landmarks existed. He observed the whisperings and smiles when the way was wide enough for two or three of the men to walk together, and surmised that he was the subject of the conversation.

At last the Bonanza was reached, and already the gaudily-decorated dining-room of the boarding-house resounded with laughter and shouting from well-nigh a hundred guests. From all corners of the district they had gathered, for where social opportunities are so rare the camp ball is a great event.

The "band" consisted of violin, cornet, and horn, accompanied by the rhythmic pounding of the performers' feet.

Women were scarce in the district, and most of the men desired to dance with every woman present, so that the periods of rest were few and short.

Liquor was dispensed freely, and some of the dancers became hilarious and others quarrelsome.

Only once was there anything approaching a fight. "Nell" Webster, a notorious character, who was once well known in the crime colony of an American city because of her more than ordinary attractiveness, had passed through many degrading experiences, and had eventually taken up her abode at the Bonanza. Excessive use of drugs and liquor had wrecked her attractiveness, but a dance was considered incomplete without her, and when excited by intoxicants she could "hold the floor with any of them." It was through one miner attempting to monopolize Nell's dances that the quarrel arose. Heated words, then curses and threats, created an ugly situation, until a few of the more sober managed to separate the angered ones. It was the last night they would quarrel over Nell. Her mad race was ended. The girl of beauty had let sin become her taskmaster, and now for years her cup of pleasure had contained only the dregs. Step by step the progress had been downward. Once, "respectable" men with refined brutality had made her think she was their valued companion, and then, like an orange from which the sweetness had been extracted, they had cast her off. For a time she gained notoriety by being the wife of Len Walsh, counterfeiter, burglar, confidence-man, and all-round crook. At that time she was known as "Len Walsh's woman," but when Len lapsed from clever crime to simple drunkenness, she left him and took another name.

And now for years her associates had been drunks and crooks.

Once during the revelry, as an opportunity presented itself, the preacher spoke a few words to her about her terrible mode of living. He thought there was a shadow of remorse as, with a forced smile, she replied, "I don't give a d—— now; better try it on somebody younger."

Two days later the preacher was asked to return to the Bonanza and "make a last prayer over Nell." They had found her lifeless body the morning following the camp ball. Her grimy shack was littered with bottles and glasses, and there were evidences of a fracas—sin-marred, sin-mauled Nell lay on the filthy floor in the dress she had worn at the dance. They buried her half a mile from the camp, and one of the boys crudely carved the word "Nell" on a cedar post, and placed it at the head of the solitary grave amid the lonely mountains. Few sadder moments has the preacher ever spent than the ones occupied in the burial of Nell. Again and again were her last words to him recalled—words that have since become an appeal in behalf of the wandering: "I don't give a d—— now; better try it on somebody younger."

But to return to the dance. It was long past midnight when the "Banner" contingent started for home. There was something of interest that

Smut had to confidentially communicate to each man. Then there was a hurried shout, "All right, boys," and the crowd immediately disappeared in the darkness. Thus far the preacher had kept his part in the agreement, but Smut Ludlow was planning that on the homeward journey the rest of the contract must be made impossible.

The miners struck a furious pace, and the preacher was for a few minutes unable to see the winding way, but he stumbled along as rapidly as the hindmost of his fellow-travellers. Very soon he realized that many of the men could not maintain that pace for long, and so, refraining from conversation, he held himself well in reserve, being content to take his pace from the slowest in the line. For half an hour no change in position took place. The foremost men were chuckling to themselves over "shaking" the preacher, and were wondering how far back on the trail he was, and whether he would spend the next few hours in the woods waiting for daylight. But their mirth was short-lived. The preacher decided that it was his move next. He could hear the panting of the men immediately ahead of him, and at a favourable opportunity he increased the length and speed of his stride, and passed two of the boys. At each widening of the trail he performed the same feat, until only Smut remained ahead.

Smut was mightily amazed when he discovered who was his nearest fellow traveller, and an oath escaped him. With vigorously swinging arms he made every effort to keep the lead, trying for a while to do a "jog-trot," but his feet began to drag heavily, and once or twice he stumbled. No word was exchanged, for Smut was being pressed to the utmost expenditure of his strength, and the other contestant had never more longed for victory. More than once he had received the cheers of the thousands when he was the favourite on McGill's field-day, but somehow he felt to-night larger issues were at stake than the athletic glory of a college. He was still comparatively fresh, for he had been only an onlooker at the dance, and had no alcohol in his system. Narrating his final contest to his fellow-worker, he said, "If ever I prayed Samson's prayer with all my heart it was right then: 'Strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God.' "

At last the two men were side by side, but only for a few seconds. With the enthusiasm of a victor the preacher quickly lengthened the distance, and managed to spare enough breath to call back, "Come on, boys; it's no use hanging around here all night." At the first winding of the trail he broke into a run, and kept it up until he reached the bunk-house. With all possible speed he unlaced his boots, threw off his coat, made himself as comfortable as possible, and when the boys filed in he was sitting alongside of the dining-table with his feet on a box and a book in his hand, looking as though he had been having a quiet night of reading.

Poor Smut! If ever a man had it rubbed in, it was Smut Ludlow. Even before the camp was reached the attack commenced. "Smut, you're a —— fool, and you've made —— fools of every —— man in the camp," started Frank Stacey.

But with characteristic Western fair play the preacher's stock went up rapidly. "That sky pilot ain't no slouch." "Gee! whiz! you should have seen him give Smut the go-by when he was plunging around like a whale in shallow water, and puffing like the 'dummy' when she's trying to make the grade with too big a haul." Many similar expressions went the round the next day, and the preacher was no longer regarded as the under-dog.

"Say, pilot," said Frank at the noon hour, "where d'you learn that gait you struck last night?" With a smile came the quiet reply, "I was brought up on the farm, and used to drive the calves to the water." As Frank walked away he remarked, "Yer guv'nor must have raised blamed good calves."

The most annoying result of the whole incident, so far as the men were concerned, lay in the fact that they were in honour bound to attend the evangelistic meeting. To some it was so exasperating that they suggested the violation of the contract. But that was not to be thought of in the opinion of the majority. "We was licked, and we'll take our medicine, though it's —— hard to swaller," said Hal Rinnell.

For the meeting that night the hand-printed signs gave the information that a series of lantern slides would be exhibited at the commencement of the service.

A few minutes after the opening, and while a popular Gospel hymn was being sung, about a dozen men availed themselves of the mercifulness of the semi-darkness, and slipped into back seats. By the time the lights were turned up they had become accustomed to their surroundings, and bore with fair grace the suggestive glances that were directed towards them.

The appeal was based on the words: "I find no fault in this Man." All the controversial weaknesses of the Church were dismissed, and the great problems of heart and life were dealt with in a manly, sympathetic manner, and men's thoughts were directed to that One whose name still occupies its splendid solitary pre-eminence. Before any person left the building, the speaker was in his accustomed place at the door to speak a personal word and give a handshake. Frank Stacey clasped the proffered hand with genuine cordiality, and in a voice that was heard by all, said, "You're playing a bully good game, preacher. You hit as good a pace to-night as last night, and if you keep it up you'll lick us to a finish before your innings is out."

Smut Ludlow was not in good humour, and as the boys sat around the bunk-house stove having their last smoke for the day, he was clearly disgusted and maddened at the changed attitude of the camp toward the preacher. Once he expressed himself after Frank had praised the preacher for his "grit." "You're a —— lot of turncoats; things are in a —— of a mess if you fellows can be bamboozled by one of these —— parasites."

"Well! we ain't the only ones what were bamboozled, Smut. He sure put in all over you last night, and if you had enough brains to fill a thimble you'd keep your fool mouth shut." Never in their long acquaintance had Frank opposed Smut to the extent of this deliverance, but there was no question but that the preacher had overcome Frank's opposition and aroused his admiration. "Anyhow," he continued, "that chap's a different brand to most of 'em, and I kinder think he can put up the genuine goods."

Frank threw his clothes over the line and clambered into his untidy bunk, and long after the heavy breathing of wearied men had become general he lay with strangely new thoughts. He agreed with the preacher that it wasn't a square deal to "find no fault in this Man," and then to deliver Him to be crucified. And that night the preacher had, by numerous illustrations, compelled the worst of men to pay their tribute to Him who was the highest that humanity has known; and yet were they any "squarer" to Him than Pilate was? Had they not much more evidence than Pilate had, and yet, in the face of an absolutely unanimous verdict of "not guilty," they pronounced what was equal to the death penalty. Again and again Frank said to himself "That ain't square."

There was not a seat to spare in the dance-hall during the subsequent nights. Frank Stacey missed no service, and when, at the mission's close, a meeting was called of those interested in the organization of a Church and the erection of a building, he was one of the little company.

When six months later they were ready to occupy the new church, Frank was insistent that Mr. ——, "the man who showed Smut where to get off," should be the preacher for the day. "Impossible," said a number; "it would cost over thirty dollars for railway fare alone." "Impossible nothing!" was Frank's response; and twenty-four hours later he handed fifty dollars to the Treasurer for railway fare and pulpit supply, and after two weeks of correspondence the announcement was made that the desired speaker was coming.

No one enjoyed the day of the opening more than Frank. The building of the church had absorbed all his interest, and now the effort was crowned with success. For several nights a dozen Welsh and English miners had practised the hymns "to give the thing a good send-off." They sat in the corner near the reading-desk, and led the music with increasing confidence as the day's services progressed.

"I guess the devil over-reached himself when he tried to make a fool of the preacher the night of the dance," said Frank, as a group stood outside at the close of the afternoon's Communion service. " 'Tain't often he gets as hard hit in the neck by his friends as he was that night."

The Church at the "Banner" has had its ups and downs during the past three years. One of the mines has closed, and many shacks are now unoccupied. Frank Stacey has gone over to Vancouver Island, and some of the "charter members" have ceased their earthly labours; but each Sabbath-day a few faithful ones, "the salt of the earth," gather for worship in the Church that Smut Ludlow unwittingly caused to be built.

CHAPTER V

"THY TOUCH HAS STILL ITS ANCIENT POWER"

JACK ROANDE was on one of his periodical sprees. For eight years he had been going the pace. They had been long, weary years to the one whom Jack had vowed to love and cherish. Night after night, through these long years, she had listened for the awful home-coming. There were few in the little mining town but had often seen her eyes reddened by weeping, and all knew of the Eastern home she had left. Among those who had joined in the "send-off," nearly fifteen years ago, were two men whose names are still honoured household words throughout the Dominion. There was no note of sadness that day, for Jack was a "model young man," and every one agreed that there was "no finer girl than Nell."

Jack blamed his downfall to dabbling in politics. "Politics are rotten in this province," said he, as he endeavoured to excuse his condition; but perhaps, as a chum of Jack's said, he only blamed politics " 'cause a fellow generally tries to find a soft place to fall." Whatever the cause, at least the fact was plain to all in the town that Jack was "down and out."

The business men said so, and agreed with the authorities that Jack was a nuisance to the town. Some of those who had assisted in his downfall spoke of him as a "dirty loafer," and even the bar-rooms, where he had "spent all," tolerated his presence only when the cruel pity of some patron called him in for a treat, or when he could exhibit some coin.

It was through the "tender mercies of the wicked" to Jack that there were three empty stockings in the Roande home on the recent Christmas Eve. "For the children's sake," there had been a tearful plea that the husband would be home Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. With glad expectancy the meagre resources of the pantry were combined by loving hands to give the nearest possible approach to a feast. From the near-by woods the children had brought cedar and pine for decorative purposes, and these, with stray bits of brightly-coloured tissue paper, had done much to give the home a Christmas appearance. The usual notes had been written to Santa Claus, and the mother-heart had lovingly suggested a curtailment of such requests as Santa might find it difficult to grant. The little ones had thrown their letters into the fire, and watched some of the gauzy ashes carried up the chimney to the mysterious but generous friend of the children, who would soon be loading his sleigh somewhere in the far north.

Jack appeared to respond to his wife's pleadings, and so on account of her many home duties she confided to him some of the requests the children had made, and how the much-coveted toys were parcelled and waiting to be called for at one of the down-town stores. No word was spoken of the sacrifice the purchases had involved, nor of the sting love had endured when for the children's sake she began to take in sewing. It was therefore agreed that Jack should bring the parcel home shortly before tea on Christmas Eve, and in the darkness it could be hidden away until the little ones were asleep.

Jack was true to his word, and started for home with the precious toys under his arm, in ample time for the evening meal.

"Merry Christmas, Jack," called a voice as Jack was rounding the saloon corner; "come on in and have one."

"Guess I'd better get home," was the hesitating reply. It needed little persuasion, however, to get Jack inside, and after a second treat he lost all anxiety to reach home, and was ready for a night's debauch.

During the tea-hour the bar patrons became fewer, and Jack's chances for further drinks were far apart. In response to a request to "chalk up a couple of whiskeys," he received an emphatic "not on your life" from the bar-tender.

There was a momentary conflict within Jack, and then the beast became lord over the man. Going to the corner he brought his parcel from the bench and placed it on the bar. "How much can I draw on for that?" There was a wild determination in the voice. Unwrapping the parcel beneath the bar, the bar-tender at once knew what the contents meant.

"I don't want 'em, Jack: you better get home to your kids." But Jack was insistent, and gradually the other weakened. "Well, it's your property, and if you're going to sell 'em I guess I may as well buy 'em as anybody else. I'll chalk you fifty cents." The articles were worth three times the amount offered, but Jack was being consumed with that hellish thirst that he had developed through many years, and he at once started to use up his credit.

A mile away an anxious wife awaited Jack's return. Cheerfully she had gone about her work until the hour for the evening meal, but with the passing moments the husband's absence caused her fears to increase.

With forced smiles she did her best to bring into the home the gladness that belongs to Christmas Eve, but the heart was heavy, and the little ones saw now and again the tears that could not be suppressed.

Bedtime was prolonged to two hours beyond the customary time, but still there was no sign of the father. Once the mother expressed the fears that were in her heart when she suggested that sometimes Santa Claus did not get to homes when the father was away, at which suggestion there were tearful little eyes and oft-expressed wishes that "daddy" would come home. Bravely the mother gathered the three children around her chair for their good-night sing. Favourite hymns of the Sabbath School were sung, and all the time four pairs of ears were alert for the sound of Jack's return.

It was while Grace's favourite hymn, "I am so glad that our Father in Heaven," was being sung, that footsteps were heard at the door. Instantly the little ones ceased their singing, as Grace joyously shouted, "It's daddy; Santa Claus will come now, won't he, mother?"

For a minute or two before Grace's glad shout two men had stood in the darkness outside the Roande home. After he had been turned out of the "Kelby House," Jack had staggered and stumbled around the streets for some time, and at last lay prostrate in the snow not far from the home of one who had often befriended him. A woman hurrying along the street suddenly saw the dark form on the snow, and with a cry of fear ran to the near-by house. The minister, who resided there, at once recognizing poor Jack, dragged him into the house, and after securing a neighbour's sleigh and a driver, started for Jack's home.

From the sleigh to the house he managed to conduct Jack safely, but when the strains of "I am so glad" from childish voices reached his ears, he stood still for a moment. How could he take such a father home at such a time! Yet it was impossible for him to remain long outside with Jack as he was, and so he guided the poor drunken father onward. Jack stumbled and fell heavily against the door just as Grace's glad shout silenced the hymn-singing. The minister was dragged almost to the floor as the door sprang open and Jack lurched into the room.

Few words were spoken, for all hearts were sad as the stupefied man almost immediately fell asleep on the floor of the sitting-room, and filled the air with the drunkard's stench. The little ones were tenderly told to go to their beds.

"Had he a parcel when you found him?" whispered the mother as soon as she could control her voice. Then followed the narration of her plans to fill the three stockings that had already been hung up at the back of the stove. And now it was too late to find out what had happened to the parcel. The minister looked into the mother's face, and then at the three empty stockings with their mute appeal for a visit from Santa Claus.

"I could bear this, hard as it is," she continued, glancing at the drunken sleeper, "but the poor children——" Her head dropped on her arms which were resting on the table, and quietly she wept over the bitter disappointment the little ones must bear on Christmas morning.

"Mrs. Roande"—a hand touched her shoulder lightly—"if you are not too wearied to wait up I'll do my best to locate the parcel." The look from the grateful mother was all that was needed to send the minister forth on his errand of love.

The store from which the toys were secured was closed, but the proprietor had not yet retired, and was able to reassure the midnight visitor that Jack had procured the parcel shortly before supper-time. It was not long before the clue led the minister to the home of the bartender. Wearied, but with mingled sorrow and anger, he rang the door bell. The man he was looking for came downstairs partly disrobed, and was manifestly surprised at a pastoral call, especially at such an hour. The minister stepped unasked into the hall. "Mr. Klint, I apologize for disturbing you, but Mr. Roande left a parcel somewhere that I must find to-night, and I understand he was in your bar-room. Do you know anything about it?"

The answer not being satisfactory, a further question was put.

"No, sir, he left nothing; we had a square deal, but that's nobody's business but mine and his."

"May I then ask if a parcel containing toys had any place in that deal?" No answer being given, the minister said with quiet firmness, "I must have an answer to that question before I leave this house. Mr. Klint, this is Christmas Eve! There are three empty stockings hanging in the room where Jack Roande lies drunk, and the things intended for those stockings must be there before morning."

"I'm not obliged to tell you or anybody else anything about my business," answered Klint surlily; "but if you are so anxious to know, then I can tell you that I bought that parcel to oblige Jack, and it was his deal, not yours."

"This is not the time for much talking. Be good enough to tell me where the parcel is now, and what you paid for it." Again there was hesitancy, and again there was pressure. At last the information was elicited that the toys were beneath the roof that sheltered them, and that the price paid was fifty cents.

"Be good enough for the children's sake, if not for your own, to take back your fifty cents and let me take the parcel."

Eventually the deal was consummated. When the toys were safely in his possession the minister said, "Mr. Klint, if you were dealt with as you deserve, you would spend Christmas day, not in your own comfortable home, but in the hospital or in jail: I only hope you are not as contemptible as your deed. I shall see you again, some other day."

The hand-clasp from the thankful mother was ample repayment for the midnight search, and in the early morning the exclamations of delight from her little ones in turn lifted something of the burden from her trouble-worn life.

Thus had it been, sorrow after sorrow, for poor Nell Roande for over eight years, and at times she felt there was little hope of any change, but the new day was soon to come, and the night of weeping was to be turned into the morn of song.

On the Tuesday night following the commencement of special services, as a little group of young men were leaving the Pool-room adjoining the Opera House, Jack Roande came stumbling along. It was a great joke, so Bill Thornton thought, to "jolly" Jack into believing that there was a "free show in the Opera

House, with pretty girls and swell dancing." Within a few minutes Jack was sitting with eyes as wide open as he could get them, ready to take in the "swell dancing." He quickly realized that he had been fooled, and catching the word "religion" he shook his fist as he departed saying, "Religion! it's all d——d rot. There's nothing in it." The missioner was down the aisle in a few seconds, and as Jack was passing through the swinging doors a kindly hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a voice, made tender by acquaintance with the Friend of sinners, said "Good-night, friend; you have the marks of a gentleman although you have made a slip to-night. I hope you will come again."

Returning to the platform he continued his message, but it was easy to see that the speaker's heart was out in the night wherever Jack was. Was it that yearning that brought Jack back again in less than half an hour? Be that as it may, the man who had left with a curse, staggered in again before the closing hymn, and made not the slightest disturbance after he reached a seat. At the close he conversed in as intelligent a way as his intoxication permitted. The conversation need not be recorded. It was one of several. Five nights later, twenty minutes after the clock had made its lengthiest strike, a subdued knock was heard at the door of the home in which the missioner was being entertained. The burner of midnight oil hurried downstairs. Jack stood in the doorway. "Mr. Williams, I've got to settle it, and I've got to do it now." Two souls tarried in the upper room, and while they tarried He came. At last the broken cry ascended, "My Father, I want to get back to Thee. Help me to walk in the paths of righteousness, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

It was a great night for the fisher of men. Like the wearied disciples of old, he said "It is the Lord."

The following night, Jack Jr., Mamie and Grace accompanied their father to the service, and happily united their voices in the service of praise.

Grace—they called her "Gay," for that was the best pronunciation wee Jean, now departed, could once give—told several of her schoolmates confidentially in her mother's words, that she had a "new daddy." And the subsequent days have proven the truth of her assertion.

The closing night arrived. The Opera House was crowded, and from the opening words, "Our Father," until the "And now I commend you to God," every one present seemed to feel that this was no ordinary religious gathering. An opportunity was given for a word from new converts.

Tenderly, prayerfully, these were urged to in some way publicly confess their new-found Lord. There was a hush as Jack stood erect. In a low, clear voice he addressed himself particularly to the half-hundred young men at the back. "I do not need to tell you what I was. Two weeks ago it would have been inconceivable to you and to me that the change I have experienced could take place. There is only One who could do it, and He has done it. I cannot say more now, but if you want to know all about it, come to me at the close of this service, or come to my home."

The eyes of the wife at his side were red again, but the tears were tears of joy. "It is very wonderful: we are all so happy. Oh, how glad I am that these services have been held," were her farewell words.

Jack's hand was the last one the missioner clasped. "Jack, you will be God's man. I go, but He remains. This change is all His doing, and He will hold you fast if you only trust Him. Many a day I'll pray for you, Jack. Remember that your feelings may change, but your purposes must endure. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Williams; God helping me I won't fail. It'll be no easy business, but I'm not in the fight alone; God's in it too. Good-bye."

And the years that have passed since these words were spoken have shown clearly enough that Jack is not fighting alone. Once again prayerful hearts are returning thanks for the touch that "has still its ancient power."

CHAPTER VI

"IF A MAN BE OVERTAKEN"

George fell—all the people knew that was what would happen. When he told in the church that he was going, with God's help, to be a Christian and "act the square," there was only one at the close of the meeting to say an encouraging word to him; the rest left him alone. On the whole, they did not believe in "results" from Special Services, and, despite the pastor's frequent appeals for their unprejudiced and wholehearted support, none were enthusiastic over the effort being put forth, and many were antagonistic. In the opinion of the majority the regular, "well-ordered" Sabbath services gave ample opportunity for those who wanted to lead different lives, and so far as reaching the outsiders was concerned, the endeavour to invite personally the non-churchgoers was quite unnecessary—all such knew they were welcome, because the fact had been on the announcement board outside the church for over ten years.

The missioner was told on all sides what a notoriously untrustworthy man George was:

"You see, we know his past, and you have been here only two weeks, or you'd know better than to put any faith in what he did and said last night. It was just a passing emotion, and it won't mean anything." So George fulfilled their expectations when he returned from the city uproariously drunk one night three weeks after the mission closed.

The morning following the outbreak the minister's wife made a special trip down street. The door of the carpenter's shop was fortunately open, and George was leaning against his bench looking, as he felt, far from happy. Pleasantly the little woman greeted him, and passed on. Then, with an exquisite piece of deception, she appeared to have a sudden after-thought, and turning quickly, she said, "Oh, George, the doors in the pantry cupboard are so swollen that I cannot close them. Could you fix them for me?"

The carpenter looked wearily at her. "I ain't feeling much like fixing anything, Mrs. Lamb, but I'd try to do most anything for you."

"Thank you, George," was the reply, "I believe you would; come as soon as you can."

George had said what was true; he believed in Mrs. Lamb, and what was still better, he felt that she believed in him. When, on the night of his confession, she took his hand and said, "I'm so glad, George," he valued her word and tone, and look and hand-clasp, as only the friendless man can.

But George was thoroughly disheartened to-day. Everybody knew what he had said in the meeting, and by now they would know that he had failed. Yet no one would blame him more than he blamed himself. He called himself a fool for going to the city. The business could have been done equally well by correspondence. From the time he decided to go he feared that he would return home intoxicated. He was quite aware of a terrible craving, that he knew only too well made it dangerous for him to frequent the old haunts so soon, but in spite of inner warnings he made up his mind to go, so that the battle was lost before the temptation was actually met.

Twice that afternoon George took up a few tools to go to the Manse in response to Mrs. Lamb's request, and twice he put them down again. The prison cell would have been entered with less fear than the Manse that day. He felt he had betrayed one of the best friends he had ever had. And so night came, and the pantry doors were untouched.

Family prayers were about to be conducted at the Manse. Baby Jean was on mother's knee, and Harold's chair was close to father's. Just before kneeling the good wife said quietly: "Please remember George, papa." There were tears in her eyes when the petition was offered "for those who have failed," and a whispered "Amen" followed each clause that was uttered in behalf of George.

The following morning George made his way to the Manse and attended to the pantry doors. When the work was finished, Mrs. Lamb led the way through the dining-room to the front door. Her hand rested on the door-knob, and she seemed in no hurry to let George out. It was evident she wanted to say something, but the words did not easily come.

At last George broke the silence, and his voice quivered with penitence as he looked for a moment into Mrs. Lamb's sympathetic eyes. "I suppose you've heard all about it, Mrs. Lamb, and the mess I've made of things?"

"Yes, George, I know, and I'm so sorry; but you are going to win yet: God's going to help you win. Perhaps, George, you trusted too much in your own strength, and you forget how weak we all are when we stand alone. You know the hymn that says—'Christ will hold me fast'? You cannot get along without Him, George. Tell Him all about it, when you and He are alone, and ask forgiveness, and, George, I know God can and will make you a good, strong, true man; He loves you, and we love you."

"You are going to win yet," and "He loves you, and we love you," were sentences that gave the man, overtaken in a fault, new hope. Deep yearnings were in his heart as he walked back to the shop. He believed his better moments were his truest moments, and yet it seemed to him that no one except Mrs. Lamb credited him with noble aspirations. He knew very well that there were Christian people who were suspicious and unsympathetic toward him, and so his better nature seemed to retire in their presence.

Later on he told how he used to feel like saying, "Why won't you believe in me, and stand by me, and give me a fighting chance?" Often he felt like a man who had been injured, and who needed support until he could reach a place of safety; and yet few did more than look with disgust on him, and think it unlikely that he could make the journey without falling. But, despite his weakness and his sin, George believed there were possibilities of noble living even for him.

The following Sabbath he was back in his place in church, a humble, penitent man. The sermon that day was different from the ones the people were used to hearing; not that it was better, for all Mr. Lamb's sermons were of a high order, but it had an element that was unusual, an element of great tenderness. The text was: "Go, tell His disciples and Peter."

Peter's past traitorous conduct was graphically pointed out, but so also was his weeping. "We cannot think too harshly of our sins," said the preacher, "but we may think too exclusively of them. Peter thought of his sins, but he also thought of His Saviour, and when he saw his Risen Lord, the erring but penitent disciple said: 'Thou knowest that I love Thee,' and the Master forgave all and sent him out to service."

The God whom the minister was accustomed to preach about was a splendid, strong, but rather pitiless Being; now they heard of a loving, pitiful Father who was ever seeking those who had turned from Him, and who was more than ready to receive them as they turned again home. All He wanted was to hear from their own lips, "Father, I have sinned." That confession opened Heaven's wardrobe for the man made disreputable by wandering.

At the close of the evening service George accepted Mrs. Lamb's invitation to "slip in and have a cup of cocoa." "Just the three of us," she added. "You know the way; walk right in." Hurriedly she passed on to give kindly greetings to a few strangers she had noticed.

For nearly two hours George and the minister sat in the glow of the firelight. It was a great relief to the disheartened man to be with those who knew all, and who yet loved him, and who, by their faith in him, gave him a little more faith in himself and in God.

Referring to his drinking habit, he said, "Sometimes I feel I'd rather drop dead in my tracks than touch it again; and then there are other days when it seems as if some slumbering devil had awakened within me, and I'm so crazy for it that I'd give the whole of Canada, if I had it, for another drink." Then, after a pause, he continued, "I suppose a man shouldn't try to blame his sin on others, but one of the earliest things I can remember, Mr. Lamb, is being held in my mother's arms and putting my hands around the beer jug while she gave me a drink. Many a night, when I was 'knee-high to a grasshopper' as we say, I have clung to her skirt, as she dragged me from bar to bar, around High Street and George Street in old Glasgow. I guess my father and mother were drunk every Saturday night for five years. One night I can remember as clear as if it was only yesterday. It was the time of the Glasgow Fair, and I was wishing they'd go home. I must have been about six years old, and my sister Janet was two years younger, and then there was a baby they called Bobbie. Mother had Bobbie fastened around her with an old shawl. She and father had been on a spree all the evening. Father was leaning against a lamp-post, just drunk enough to say the fool things that amuse some of them folks who don't think anything about the big price somebody is paying for that kind of fun. Maybe you think it's queer of me to talk that way, when God knows I've been guilty enough myself. Well! Let me finish my story, anyway. My mother was dead drunk, sitting on the curbstone near him, and maybe Bobbie was stupefied with liquor like I had been many a time. Once in a while she'd rouse up, and press her hands against her maddened head and shriek all kinds of curses. Police! why, Mr. Lamb, the Glasgow police couldn't have handled the crowds that was drunk them days. I've seen hundreds of drunken men and women in one night around Rotten Row and Shuffle Lane, and other streets near the corner of George and High Streets: so long as they didn't get too awful bad the police let them alone. Mother was a very devil when she got fighting. I've heard father brag about what she could do in that line. When she used to roll up her sleeves for a fight, she was like a maddened beast. I tell you, there isn't much in the fighting line I haven't seen; but it makes me kind of shudder yet when I think of how she'd punch, and kick, and scratch, and all the time she'd be using language that would make a decent man's blood run cold. You were saying something about 'sacred memories around the word "mother" ' in one of your sermons, but that was the kind of mother I had, Mr. Lamb.

"It must have been near Sunday morning when somebody helped to get us home. Janet and me had been sleeping in the gutter, and I can remember the time they had getting father and mother up the stairs in the 'Close.' Somebody slipped near the top, and there was a heap of us jammed against the wall at the turning of the stairs. But we children were used to bruises, and we learned to keep quiet, or we'd only get more for our trouble. I likely cried myself to sleep on the rotten old floor, and I suppose I'd never have remembered any more about it if it hadn't been for Bobbie. In the morning the poor wee chap was dead. He must have died through neglect; pretty close to murder I call it. Did the death make any difference to the parents? Not likely! At least I never remember them any different. I was ten years old when my mother died, and she died through stumbling in a drunken fight; her head struck the curbstone, and she never spoke again. After her death I was taken care of in one of the Orphanages until I was sent to Canada. But what I often wonder about, Mr. Lamb, is whether God will be hard on those of us who've had parents like that, and who've been brought up where we didn't get a fair chance. God only knows what we kids had to see and hear and suffer. People don't make any allowance for bad blood, and bad food, and bad treatment, except in cattle. I wonder if God does? Yes, I know I'm having a chance now, and yet God must pity even me when He knows how I've been handicapped for these years; but some of those boys live and die right there, and they don't get even the chance I've had. It's easy for folks who know nothing about it to say the people should get out of such places; but some of them are like heathen, they don't know there's anything better. What did I know about a different kind of life? Where could I have gone? Who would have wanted me? How could a street youngster get out of the place, where a good many of his meals were picked off the streets and out of the ash-barrels, and he never had two coppers ahead? And there were thousands like I was. I think about these things once in a while, when I'm alone in the shop, and I've sometimes thought it was well-nigh a crime to allow children to be born in such hell-like places. And there are some people have no right to be fathers and mothers at all."

It was only rarely that George unburdened his mind to such an extent; but Mr. Lamb gave him "right-of-way" that night, and many perplexities were expressed with a candour that gave the minister a larger sympathy with the handicapped man, and a resolve to deal more tenderly with men of George's type who had such terrific battles to keep the body under.

At the close of the conversation the evening prayer especially commended George to the Father's care, and while the encouraged man was walking back to his dwelling-place with thankful heart, Mr. and Mrs. Lamb were kneeling together, and in earnest petition were placing their home and all they might ever possess at the service of the One in whose hands things commonplace may be mighty with blessing.

The missioner has been permitted to visit again the Manse where George did a bit of carpentering. It was a great pleasure to find that George was one of those invited to the evening meal. During the after-supper conversation he spoke confidentially to the visitor of the mistress of the Manse. "She's the greatest little woman in this country. God knows I'd have still been on the down-grade but for her; she never let me go. She told me one night how she'd told God that she couldn't go to heaven and leave me outside, and thank God He's taking her at her word."

The midnight chat which ministers are accustomed to have on such occasions revealed the story of George's many and sore temptations and hard battles, and of how the unfailing faith and patience of one in the Manse had heartened the discouraged man, had led him into active service, and had brought a new sense of responsibility and possibility to many of the church members who were beginning to practice Paul's injunction: "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

CHAPTER VII

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S VISIT

"Hope to visit your field Wednesday, February nineteenth—arrive M—— Station midnight, eighteenth. Andrew Ransom."

The Western minister had been "house-cleaning" his study, and in separating the valued from the useless he ran across the above telegram, which had been buried away for several years. He handled it almost reverently and then put it away in his Home Mission folder for future reference. The story connected with it was told one night as the missioner sat after the evening's service in the quiet of the prairie manse, exchanging reminiscences of one of the greatest and best-loved men that ever crossed the prairie provinces —Andrew Ransom, the great Home Missionary Superintendent.

Within fifteen minutes from the time the student missionary received the above message, the people in McLean's general store, in Stevenson's boarding-house, and in Mallagh's blacksmith's shop had heard the good news, and all knew that Wednesday the nineteenth would be a great day for those whose homes the old Doctor could visit, and for the people who could get into the little church at night.

Those who had met and heard Dr. Ransom before, vied with each other in recalling events connected with his former visits. They remembered his appeal for their "fair share" of money to help build the little church. Everybody said the amount could not be raised until Dr. Ransom came, but after he had painted his word-picture of their glorious heritage—after he had pleaded that that heritage should never become "the wild and woolly West"—after he had shown the Gospel as the "antiseptic influence" in the life of the great Westland—after he told them what they got their land for and what it was worth that day, and after that strong voice, with its downright sincerity, had been lifted in prayer, everybody in the dining-room of the boarding-house knew the amount was raised.

And then that hand-clasp, and that identification of himself with the poorest settler's problems, and sorrows—who could forget these things?

"D'ye mind," said Dick McNabb, "the time he was here just after Alex. McLaren's son was killed on the railway? Well, sir, I'll never forget seeing them two old men standing with hands clasped. The Doctor looked as if it might 'a been his own boy what was killed. 'McLaren,' he said, 'I'm sorry for you. I once lost a boy, and I know what it means'; then he whispered something, and Alex. wiped away the tears as he still clung to the old Doctor's hand, and I guess they stood that way for two or three minutes."

"Well, sir, you bet Grant Sinclair won't miss Wednesday night," put in Dan McLean from behind the counter. "D'ye mind when Dr. Ransom was here, Grant couldn't walk at all! Say! will I ever forget that day in the Fall when he fell off the fence on to the scythe he was carrying? The gash was a foot long and there was no doctor within thirty miles, and the road wasn't as good as it is now, and it ain't anything to write home about even yet. Bill Grayson was the only one who had the grit to sew the gash up, and it was fourteen hours before the doctor got here. Nobody thought Grant would get over it; he lost so much blood. He'd been on his back about two months, I mind, when Dr. Ransom came. It was one of them dirty days when it don't know whether to snow or rain, but the old Doctor had heard about Grant and was bound to get out there. The folks said he did him more good than the regular doctor did. Jim Sinclair and the boys had rigged up a pair of crutches so's to get Grant a-moving around, but they didn't make a very swell job of it. Well, sir, about three weeks later the slickest pair of crutches you ever set eyes on come out here with some express of mine. They was addressed to Grant and marked '*Rush.*' Mind you, they come from Toronto, and they fitted Grant as if he'd been measured for them. Jimmy said after they got the crutches he remembered the old Doctor kind o' spanning the quilt along Grant's side while he was talking, but he never paid no particular attention to it, but he says that's how he must 'a got the measure."

The days between the thirteenth and the nineteenth were spent by Mr. Stewart, the student missionary, in covering the district, so that all the scattered settlers should know of Dr. Ransom's visit. On Tuesday morning he borrowed an extra robe, and, hitching up his team of bronchos, started on his journey to M—— station. The roads were heavy, and twenty-five miles was a hard journey through the unpacked snow. By mid-afternoon he reached the railway, and soon had his ponies comfortably stabled in a near-by barn.

About midnight he tramped through the deep snow to the dimly-lighted station. The night operator reported the train as an hour late, with the additional information that she would probably lose a little more time on the grade which lay about ten miles away.

Shortly before two o'clock the welcome whistle was heard, and in a minute or two the midnight express slowed down for M——. The tall figure of the Superintendent was behind the brakeman, on the steps of the day-coach, and there was a wave of recognition before the cordial hand-clasp and words of greeting could be given. "We'll just wait till she pulls out," said the Superintendent, as Mr. Stewart started to move away after the exchange of greetings. "Yon operator has the tongue." His duties performed at the baggage car, the operator returned to the office dragging a heavy trunk along the plank platform. "Man! but that's a great muscle you have," said the Doctor genially, and in less than a five-minute conversation he knew the man's name, Old Land home, length of time in Canada, and church relationship. As he gripped the hand in bidding good-night, he got in a message that the operator has never forgotten. In recalling the visit to the writer many months later, he said, "He's a gran' man that: he'd be a wechty man gin he lived in Edinburgh. He mak's you think."

"Well, Doctor," said Mr. Stewart as they neared the place where a bed had been prepared, "you'll be glad enough to get right to rest."

"How far are we from your field, Mr. Stewart?"

"About twenty-five miles," was the reply.

"Well, then, if your team is fit, I think we'll not bother about bed just now, but get out there." Despite the protests that were made in the Doctor's interests, there was a kindly insistence that resulted in the bronchos being immediately harnessed for the return journey. In the month of February, with deep snow and zero weather, a twenty-five mile drive between three and eight a.m. is by no means a pleasure trip. As the little animals ploughed their way through the drifts, the Superintendent every now and again raised his mouth above his coat collar to express his admiration. "A gr-reat team that—a gr-reat team."

The day was dawning as on Wednesday the 19th the student missionary and the eagerly-looked-for visitor, frost-covered and shivering, drove up to Mackenzie's barn. Mackenzie and his wife were just getting on the fires, and were not a little surprised at the early arrival of their distinguished guest. Embarrassment could not, however, remain long in any home where Dr. Ransom entered. Everybody but the indolent admired and loved him, and there seemed to be no circumstance or combination of circumstances but he could adapt himself to.

After breakfast Mr. Stewart was ready enough to get a few hours' rest, and having conferred with Mrs. Mackenzie regarding the readiness of the spare room for the Superintendent, he invited the latter to retire. "Did you think I came out here to get a sleep, my boy? When would we visit the field? No! no! thank you." Protests were again futile. "I have to meet two Committees on Saturday, in Winnipeg, and you must get me back to M—— Station in time for the 11:30 to-morrow morning. What about a horse? Can we get right away?"

"Ain't the old Doctor a horse to work," said Mackenzie to Stewart while hitching up his best driver.

Hurried but helpful and purposeful calls were made until it was time to return for the evening service. The visit that stands out most clearly in the Missionary's memory was one made at the noon-hour. Alex. McDonald's place was the one spot in the whole district where no man who had any respect for his stomach would ever dream of dining. Few, indeed, cared even to enter the dirty little shack. And so it was not to be wondered at that the missionary was planning to pass McDonald's on the up trip, and to reach one of those bright, clean centres of hospitality that are usually to be found in even the most isolated district. But "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley."

"Who lives in the shack on the hillside?" asked the Superintendent.

"A family named McDonald," was the reply, "but they never enter a church—they live like pigs, and I think we had better leave calling there until we see how our time holds out."

"We'll go there for dinner," was the almost brusque response of the Superintendent. Stewart laughed incredulously.

"I don't think you could swallow a homœopathic pill in that shack, Doctor."

"We'll go there for dinner, Mr. Stewart. It'll do them good."

"No finer missionary stands in shoe-leather than Caven Stewart" was a testimony that all who knew him heartily agreed with, but Stewart had an absolute horror of dirt, and it was with feelings of distressful anticipation that he dragged open McDonald's rickety apology for a gate, and drove across the rough swamp to the dilapidated shack on the hillside.

The barking of the dog brought faces to the little four-paned window. "Drive slowly! Give them time, give them time," said the Superintendent, as the faces quickly disappeared. A few fowls fluttered from within the shack, and a family pet in the shape of a pig grunted disapproval at being forced to take an outside berth. For fully three minutes there was such a house-cleaning as the old shack had not known for many a month.

Alex. McDonald, pulling a dirty corduroy coat around him, sauntered over to where the visitors were getting out of the cutter. He "guessed" that the Superintendent and the student could find accommodation for their horse, and a bite for themselves during the noon hour. "We ha'ena got much of a place," he said, as the Superintendent lowered his head to enter the miserable shack.

Each member of the family received a cheery greeting from the magnetic superintendent, who never seemed at a loss to say the fitting word. Mrs. McDonald was profuse in explanations and apologies. "We wesna expectin' onybody, and these dark mornings it seems to be noon afore you can get turned round." The visitors entered sympathetically into the various reasons why things "wesna just straight."

To this day Caven Stewart remembers the deepened convictions that came to him of the Superintendent's possibilities, as he watched him enjoy his dinner. By various excuses Stewart had reduced his own portion to the minimum when the pork and potatoes were dished up, and even then more food went to his pocket than to his mouth. But not so with the Superintendent. Not only did he have a liberal first supply, but actually passed back his plate for more, meantime complimenting McDonald on the gr-reat potatoes he grew and the fine pork he raised, and incidentally remarking that the best potatoes and the finest pork were easily spoiled in the hands of an incompetent cook. When he told Mrs. McDonald that the dinner was just as he liked it—well-cooked and plain—his place in her highest esteem was fixed. That he was a man of excellent judgment she had no doubt.

McDonald's Old Land home was well-known to the Superintendent, and as scenes familiar to both were recalled, geniality prevailed.

At the close of the meal the Doctor asked for "The Book." Anxious looks were exchanged by the occupants of the shack, and ere long three members of the family were uniting in the search. When at last, to the great relief of the searchers, a dusty but unworn Bible was produced, the Superintendent held it reverently in his outstretched hand. Looking squarely at the head of the home, he said with a yearning that no man could miss, "Eh, mon, but I'm sorry—sorry it's not worn more. It's the best piece of furniture you have in the house. If any man ought to have a well-worn Bible it's a Highland Scotsman." A few verses were impressively read, and then for the first time in its history the miserable shack contained a group kneeling in the attitude of prayer.

There were no meaningless pleasantries when the little company arose. It seemed as though the place was hallowed ground. A man and his Maker had been in communion. The invitation to "cast thy burden upon the Lord" had been heeded, and with an exquisite tenderness the anxieties, the problems, the hopes and the fears of the little home were brought to the Great Burden Bearer.

The parting was little short of affectionate. The last hand-clasp was McDonald's. "McDonald, I can scarcely believe you've never darkened the kirk door, and you an Aberfeldy man. I want you to give me your word for it that next Sabbath morning you and the good wife and the bairns will make a new start and be found worshipping God. Six months from now I expect to hear from Mr. Stewart that you've been regular in attendance at the house of God. McDonald! give me your word that you'll not disappoint me—nor Him!"

No words came from McDonald's lips, but there were moistened eyes and a lingering hand-clasp that made the Superintendent's heart glad.

When, nine months later, Stewart was leaving the field for college, and was reporting conditions to the Superintendent, he wrote as follows:

"You will remember the visit I did not want to make at the McDonalds. May God forgive me for my lack of interest and of faith! Since last February McDonald, with some of his children, has never missed a service. At the Communion in June, Rev. Mr. Rowatt came over from the Fort and welcomed seven new members, John McDonald, his wife, and their son Bruce being among the number. The Bible you helped them to resurrect has been much 'thumbed' since then. I am thankful I stayed the year on this field. To have seen the change that has taken place in the shack on the hillside has done more for me than the whole year's course in Apologetics."

CHAPTER VIII

THE COOKEE

It had been a bitterly cold drive across what was known as "The Plains," and the student missionary was thankful when his pony reached the shelter of the jack-pines. After a few miles of bush a small "clearance" was reached. The low-roofed shack standing at the back of it never looked more inviting than to-day; but though twenty-five miles from the "highway of commerce," there were homes still more remote that had been expecting a visit from the little preacher for some time, and so, despite his pony's protest against driving by even poor shelter in weather like this, he had regretfully to tell her she might not turn in that road to-day. As was the missionary's custom in passing any dwellings, he waved his greeting in the direction of the humble shack. Before he had gone many yards the good-natured pioneer farmer was outside shouting his "halloos," and, on being heard, signalled for the preacher to stop. Making his way through the snow, he said, "Ain't you going to give us a call to-day? Better come in and get thawed out; soon be grubbing time."

"Not to-day, Mac, thanks," was the reply. "I've been to your place pretty often, and I thought I ought to make the end of this road to-day."

"Well, if you won't come in, I'll tell you what I was a-wanting to ask you. There's a fellow I'd like you to see awful well. Say! do you call on anybody else except Protestants? You do, eh? Well, I wish you'd see Jimmy Hayson. He's in a bad fix. They shipped him home from the camp. He was cookee there, and I guess he couldn't stand that kind of life. His stummick's gone on a holiday. Anyway, he's most all in. It ain't much of a trail to follow, but after you pass Marston's you'll see a wood road, and then, if you keep your eyes skinned, on the north side you'll see, about forty rod along, a foot track—Jimmy ain't got any team—just follow the track, and you'll stumble into his shack."

The second stop that afternoon was at Hayson's. It was a poor place for a sick man to be in. The entire furnishings of the home would not have been a bargain at five dollars. The wife was most grateful for the visit, and before the missionary had spoken to the invalid, she said, "You are the only preacher ever in our house; and will you make a bit of a prayer for Jimmy?" A few flour sacks had been made into a curtain, and the faithful wife pulled them aside and gazed lovingly at the sick man, and then questioningly at the missionary. The missionary felt that not many prayers would have to be made for Jimmy, and perhaps there was an increased tenderness in his voice as it was lifted to the Friend of the weary and heavy-laden. The five children were not very clear as to what was going on, and during the devotions the dog kept up a low growl of distrust at the whole procedure, but the wasted form of poor Jimmy, and the subdued sobs of the wife, overshadowed minor disturbances.

It was the first of almost a dozen calls during the next two months. A round trip of thirty-two miles once a week meant something over unbeaten tracks; but Jimmy was in need, and there was only One Helper: other helpers had failed, and Jimmy was pathetically eager for something he had not hitherto received.

On the occasion of the fourth visit, the wife called the visitor as far away from the sick bed as the dimensions of the little shack permitted. "Would you"—the voice was agitated—"would you——. Oh! please, you won't mind me asking, but would you stay for dinner; we've never had a minister to take a bite in our house, and Jimmy'd be so pleased?"

The invitation was most gladly accepted. What a time ensued! How the poor soul exerted herself to prepare that meal! It was over an hour before the "bite" was ready, and in that hour one child had gone over two miles. The preacher saw her fluttering rags as she ran across the snow. He saw her come back with a little newspaper package. It contained a knife and fork—two miles, that the preacher might have a knife and fork! The meal was not appetizing, but after the trouble it had cost, no man with a heart could leave a morsel which it was possible to dispose of.

Day by day Jimmy weakened, and it was evident that he needed attention and quiet, such as was not possible in the one-roomed shack. Could he gain entrance to the distant hospital, and was it possible to provide anything like a satisfactory conveyance in which the sick man could safely make the journey from that pioneer district? These possibilities especially occupied the mind of the missionary on a subsequent visit.

He talked to the now worn-out wife about the matter. Prejudices against hospitals were very real in that remote district, and it was some time before she could be convinced that such a course would be in the interest of the family. The few neighbours did much coming and going for the next two days, and such blankets and wrappings as the community afforded were provided for the cold journey. Bricks and hardwood sticks were to be heated and placed around Jimmy to keep him as warm as possible. Henry Wallis was to make the trip the day before to arrange for the replenishing of these, and for some nourishment for the sick man, at three selected stopping-places.

It was late in the evening when the sleigh pulled up in front of the hospital. The sufferer had stood the journey better than was expected. The "Sisters" soon had Jimmy in the most comfortable bed that he had occupied for years.

Two days later the missionary called at the hospital as early in the morning as he was permitted to. Jimmy knew his end was not far distant. He could speak but little, and in order to hear the feeble whisper it was necessary to put an ear close to the patient's lips. Very slowly the words came: "Say—about—Shepherd." Once more the Shepherd Psalm was repeated with its message for those whose lives are overshadowed. Jimmy's eyes spoke his thanks, and tenderly the student wiped the tears off the sunken cheeks. Something else was wanted. Again the whisper was with difficulty understood: "Tell—about—rest." It was the words that only the publican Matthew has recorded that Jimmy wanted to hear.

Slowly they were repeated: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Once again the parched lips moved: "If—I—could—see children—that's all." The eyes were so irresistibly pleading that the student could only reply, "I'll try, Jimmy."

A few words were spoken to the nurse. How long would Jimmy be here? She thought he might go that night. Certainly within three days the end would come. It was no small undertaking to bring a family such as the Haysons' into town. Clothing had to be procured in order that the little ones might be protected on the longest journey any of them had ever taken. Their own scanty attire would afford little protection from the cold wind. And so hurried visits were made to a few homes, and to the stores of one or two merchants. The case was briefly stated, and a dozen hearts instantly kindled into kindness for the needy ones in the lonely home. A wardrobe, such as the Hayson family had never dreamed of, was soon stowed away on the missionary's "jumper."

Inside of two hours the long, cold drive was commenced. At each shanty and shack word was given as to the sick man's condition, and what the present journey was for. Within five miles of the lonely home, which would soon be the abode of the fatherless and widow, the missionary stopped for the night. In the dimly-lighted shack of Sandy MacGregor Jimmy's last request was made known. MacGregor rose from a nail-keg on which he was sitting, and said slowly and emphatically, "Well, if Jimmy wants to see the children, he's a-going to see 'em."

The student grasped the roughened hand of the speaker gratefully. "I knew I could count on you, Mac. Thanks. I'm tired, so I'll say good-night. I can sleep now that that's settled."

Before the missionary appeared the next morning, Mac had everything ready for driving Jimmy's family into the town where the husband and father was rapidly nearing his end.

The horses were driven as hard as was consistent with mercy. Jimmy was still alive, the Sister told them as they stood in the hall. In a moment they were beside the bed. It was one of those scenes that live in the memory. The sobbing wife, kissing again and again the poor, wan face. The little ones weeping, perhaps more in sympathy with the mother than on account of their own realization of the coming sorrow. Quietly the large screen was placed around the group at the bedside, and for a few moments the family was left alone. The journey had been accomplished just in time. In less than an hour Jimmy was gone. His last request was for the passages of Scripture mentioned above. "Yes, that's it," he whispered, "rest—rest." The wasted arm was raised a little as if he would put it around the missionary's shoulder, but the poor Cookee's strength had departed. They saw he would say something more, and ears were alert to catch his every word. "I—think——" Then there was a long pause, and the sunken eyes turned from face to face as though seeking to tell them what the tongue refused to utter. They waited with tear-bedimmed gaze, but no other word was uttered. Ere long there was a rattling in the throat, and the death-pallor increased; a few short and long-separated gasps and the Cookee had finished his course. They laid him away in the quiet little cemetery during an almost blinding snowstorm.

With less than five dollars in cash, and a rough bit of land heavily mortgaged, the mother went back to the lonely shack to toil through weary days to provide for her five little children. With occasional help from other settlers, the struggle for existence was made a little less severe.

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Ten years have passed away. The poverty-stricken pioneers of earlier days have cleared large sections of land, and the earth has brought forth her fruit. Prosperity abounds. Where Jimmy Hayson's shack stood is an attractive modern farm-house. A mother looks proudly at her farmer son as she introduces him to a city pastor who is visiting the mission field of his student ministry. A few hours later, in the quiet of eventide, she stands with the visitor exchanging incidents of bygone days.

"It's been a pretty hard road to travel, sir, but the neighbours were just as good as they could be after Jimmy went. But I often say to my boy Allan that there is only One who can help us in such times as I passed through then."

CHAPTER IX

THE REGENERATION OF BILL SANDERS

A SEVERE snow-storm had raged for over twelve hours, and the home missionary was twenty miles away from headquarters. His little Indian pony was "all grit," as one of the settlers said, but with darkness only two hours away, the preacher began to reconsider his decision to make The Valley and home that night. Not a few days "Queenie" and her driver had travelled fifty miles, but today the drifting snow almost blinded man and beast, and with eleven miles of unbeaten path on the storm-swept plain immediately before him, the missionary hesitated. At best it would be dark before he reached the bush, and he had not forgotten a former experience, when anxious hours were spent in a similar storm seeking to find the rarely-travelled road that led from the plain through the bush to The Valley.

One reason out of several that made him anxious to get home was the fact that Widow Nairn's wood-pile needed replenishing. She was a poor friendless old woman, who had remained on a plot of ground to which she had only "squatter's rights," and while the few scattered neighbours were kindness itself, the widow was, as Grayson said, so "blamed peculiar" that it was "hard to know how to do anything for her without making her mad." Perhaps she could get along for one more day, and the missionary resolved to drive directly to her shack the next morning.

The decision being made, he spoke cheerily to his pony, and after a little manœuvring, the cutter was turned around and Queenie was headed towards the spot where two solitary pines rose like sentinels from the underbush. The road to Pearson's was not far beyond these landmarks, and the home was one of the few he knew in this rarely-visited district.

An hour later he peered anxiously through the storm. The snow melting around his eyes made seeing difficult, and he began to fear he had taken a wood-path instead of the one intended. Pulling up his pony, he listened for the jingle of bells, the bark of a dog, the call of a settler, or anything that might help him to locate some abode, but no sound except that made by the winter wind reached him. Tying his pony to a poplar, he plunged ahead in an endeavour to find out something about the road he was on. In a few minutes he saw that the trees closed together again, and knew that the pony had taken the wrong track.

Once more the cutter was turned around with considerable difficulty. It was a hard return journey; every sign of their own recently-made track was gone, and the snow was still falling.

No more welcome sound had been heard by any ears that day than when distinct, though somewhat distant, the tired traveller heard the bark of a dog. Stopping his pony, he engaged in a barking contest, until he was sure of the direction from which the sound came. "We are all right now, thank God," he said aloud.

Through the trees a light flickered a few minutes later, and soon a pioneer's home came into view. The little clearance with its low-roofed log-house was not one the missionary had seen before, but where there was a house there was hospitality on a night like this.

Bill Sanders was soon assisting the traveller to unhitch, and with the aid of a "bug" * Queenie was crowded into the roughly constructed stable. There were times when it would have been both difficult and dangerous to have put her into such quarters, but that night she seemed to understand, and behaved herself accordingly.

The occupants of the little home consisted of father, mother, two boys and two girls. When the missionary introduced himself there was

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* A tin lard pail fixed to hold a candle and to serve as a lantern.

manifest embarrassment on the part of the wife, and the children gazed in wonderment from "the room" door; they were unwilling to run any risks through getting too close to this human novelty until they saw how he acted. "You see, sir, we don't have many people here, and they aren't used to strangers: I guess you are the first minister that's been in this house"; and then, as the husband went to bring in a fresh supply of firewood, she added half apologetically, "but I was praying all week that God might send somebody in here that loved Him. When I used to work for Home Missions in Ontario, I never thought how much I'd long for the visit of a missionary myself some day; it's very lonesome sometimes."

Before the missionary retired to his allotted space on the floor, he asked permission to read a few verses of Scripture. There was no response from the father: the mother said, "Yes, please."

The Scripture and prayer were for the encouragement of the heavy laden, and tears were wiped away from the mother's eyes as the little group arose from kneeling.

When prayers were mentioned after breakfast the next morning, Bill Sanders deliberately left the shack. "Two doses of religion within twelve hours" were too many for him, as he often said in after years when recalling the missionary's visit. "We've a lot to be thankful for," said the much-tried wife, as the visitor spoke a few words of encouragement. The missionary glanced at the mud floor, at the roughly-hewn table, at the round blocks used for chairs, at the newspaper curtains, at the flour-sacks that partitioned off the bed-room, at the miscellaneous and damaged collection of dishes and tins that rested on the coverless table, and wondered wherein the "lot to be thankful for" lay. "We don't get along well with the farm; somehow Bill don't——." The words were checked, and nothing suggestive of complaint at the husband was uttered. "The children are well," she continued, "and they are obedient," and then, with a fine reticence that cannot be written, she added slowly, "I am trying to teach them about God; and I often tell them that if the shack isn't a credit to us, we must try to be a credit to it. You see, sir, I'm not strong, and with the little ones to look after, I can't work outside as much as a settler's wife ought; but anyhow, I'd rather leave my children a good character than anything else. Yes, God knows I would."

Late in the morning the storm was over, and with a promise on the part of the missionary to return again as soon as possible, and on the part of the children to come to a Sunday School being started in the four-mile-distant schoolhouse, good-byes were said.

Many weeks passed before the missionary could visit again the lonely little home. This time the mother, pale and trembling, was struggling from the stable with a pail of milk. Inside the house lay a four-days'-old baby boy. The missionary's heart was heavy. Since his last visit he had heard of the faithfulness and goodness of the wife and mother, and of the brutality of the husband and father, but he found it hard to believe that any man would compel his wife to do what this poor creature had been made to do in such a physical condition.

At first there was fight in the missionary's heart, but when the lazy, cruel husband returned from his rabbit-snaring, the fighting spirit had been replaced by a great yearning for this man's salvation. To angrily rebuke Bill might only add to the wife's burden, while "the soul of all improvement is the improvement of the soul." Bill's need was of a changed heart.

A prayer for guidance was breathed forth as he walked to meet one who, a few years ago, had promised to protect and love the wife whose spirit was crushed and whose heart was well-nigh broken by neglect and abuse.

The two men stood talking for some time on the evening of that now memorable day. Often the pale face of an anxious, prayerful wife looked out through the tiny window. Perhaps the prayer within was mightier than the simple message spoken without, but at any rate new desires and purposes were awakened in Bill's heart that night. There was no sudden "light of glory," or ecstatic condition, but during the next few weeks it was evident that this man was being changed. When the missionary suggested getting his pony hitched, Bill urged him to remain overnight. At retiring time, it was the father who handed a much-soiled Bible to the preacher. Strange that so simple an act as that should cause the wife to weep, but at that hour she saw the dawning of a new day.

Three weeks later the scattered settlers "visiting" outside the schoolhouse on Sunday afternoon were amazed to see Bill Sanders bringing his wife to church on the "jumper."

The singing in the little service was usually more hearty than harmonious. For two or three years it had been an unsettled and vexed question as to whether Sam Gadsley or Martha McLeod was the finer singer. One faction deemed the matter settled beyond all controversy when a late arrival at the service confided to a few friends at the close that he "could hear Sam, good, clear across the concession," while he "couldn't have told whether Martha was there at all, at all." Martha's friends felt keenly the consequent verdict of the community, deposing their champion.

To-day the missionary broke all his own previous records in the singing of "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow."

People said "it was a great sermon that the little parson preached" that day. Although the congregation may not have known it, the preacher almost broke down in prayer, his heart was so filled with gratitude. When he shook hands with Bill, there was a grip that thrilled newcomer and preacher alike. To the wife he managed to say, "I'm so glad," and the now happy woman looked as though the opening doxology had become a large part of her very self.

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The visit of the Home Mission Superintendent is always a great day in these isolated places, and when on his next visit he welcomed the new members into full communion, and took father, mother, and two children from the little log-house, not a few felt it was the greatest day the schoolhouse had seen.

During the subsequent days of the missionary's term of service, whenever there was work to be done, Bill Sanders could be counted on.

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After a lapse of ten years, the missionary stood once more in The Valley. As is true of most

Western communities, everything was changed. A little city had arisen—the old schoolhouse was no more, and the once well-known places could no longer be located. But there stands a beautiful little church not far from where the old schoolhouse once stood, and one of the honoured elders bears the name of William Sanders. Two of his daughters teach in the Sabbath School, and of the five children, a well-known business man said, "Why, you'd just be proud of every one of them, if they were your own."

In the churchyard a marble slab bears the name, "Mary Perry Sanders," and near the base, "She hath done what she could." As was her desire in the days of struggle and isolation, the patient, faithful mother had left the precious legacy of a good character to her children.

Thus had the seed sown brought forth its fruit after many days. Among hallowed memories, few are so precious to the missionary as that of the day when his now old friend "Queenie" took the wrong road. And whenever on lonely prairie, in quiet hamlet, or noisy city, he hears a congregation sing Cowper's hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform," he thinks of that distant, stormy winter day when a barking dog led him to a home that is now transformed, and to a darkened life that was in God's goodness guided into that light "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

CHAPTER X

THE SNAKE-ROOM

THE hotels in the town on the "boundary" * were crowded. For several days the men had been returning from the bush after the winter's cut, until over a thousand "lumber-jacks" from the various camps in the immediate vicinity had taken possession of the place. For most of these men the bar-room was the only social centre, and the arrival of each gang meant the recognition of old friends and the celebration thereof in a call for "drinks all round."

In a hallway adjoining a popular barroom the missioner stood sadly watching the procession of hard toilers losing at the one time their winter's earnings and the control of their faculties. It seemed useless to plead with the men either collectively or individually.

"It's the only way we've got to let off steam, boss—it's a fool way, you bet, but here goes." The speaker was a man of not over thirty years of age. With unsteady step he entered the barroom again, and pushed his way to the double

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* Boundary line between U. S. and Canada.

line that kept the bar-tenders perspiring as they sought to respond to the sometimes cursing demands for more rapid service.

Along the hallway were men in various stages of intoxication, and the missioner knew from past experiences that some of the men were only at the beginning of a debauch that would last for several days, perhaps weeks. Much had been done by the lumber companies to improve the conditions in camp and to brighten and turn to good account the long winter evenings. Then, in order to protect the earnings of the men at paytime, arrangements were made to furnish immediate facilities for banking or for remitting home; yet everything proved ineffective in the case of some. The open bar with its foolish and dangerous treating system had led to what had become known around town as "the lumberjacks' annual spring spree."

The cashier of one of the companies sauntered through the crowd, and the missioner entered into conversation with him, questioning him about the men thronging the bar-room. "Yes, Reverend, I know most of the boys; I make out paychecks for over two hundred of them, and in my time I've run across thousands, and most of them are splendid fellows if you can only keep the booze away from them. They look pretty well damaged just now, eh? And they'll be worse yet.

When they get started you can't stop them till they're at the end of their tether. See that fellow lighting his cigar in Ern. Dean's pipe? Wait till he turns round a bit—there! now! his ear's half gone, see? He's some fighter, believe me! A year ago last month somebody got a few bottles of whiskey into the camp on the q.t. We try to keep it out, but you might as well try to keep out mosquitoes in June. Well, sir, that night Bill got into a fight with a chap called Frenchy, and in about ten minutes Frenchy needed an identification label on him. Bill was clean plumb crazy, and as Frenchy had been looking for a scrap for weeks the boys let them have their innings for a while. Just before the boys pried them apart, the two of them took a deuce of a tumble to the bunkhouse floor, and somehow Frenchy got his teeth on Bill's ear. We couldn't patch the thing together, so Bill had to foot it nearly thirty miles to the nearest town, and you see what the crossbones had to do to trim off his receiving apparatus? Bill gets ninety dollars a month—I handed him a check for four hundred and fifty last Saturday, and it would be safe to bet the whiskies he hasn't fifty dollars left right this minute. He doesn't know what he's done with it—quite likely a pile of it has been swiped when he was dead to the world. Between ourselves, Reverend, there's lots of dope served out right here, and when the boys come to, a good part of their boodle is gone. Just the other day Dick Booth was yelling blue murder around here, and Bertois came from the office and hooked his arm into Dick's and said, 'Come on, Dick, and have one on me.' In less than five minutes there wasn't so much as a chirp from Dick, and he looked like the dickens for a few seconds, and then he slid down the wall to the floor, and Bertois and Sam carried him into the snake-room. You bet Bertois fixed Dick's drink alright. The trouble comes between seasons when the boys are off a few weeks. They come into town to kill time, but it works the other way round."

Two days later the missioner was sitting writing at the hotel table when Bill, blear-eyed, unshaven and dirty, came staggering toward him. The voice was almost terrifying in its intensity of appeal, "For God's sake give me something to eat; I've had nothing but that stuff (pointing toward the barroom) for three days."

Before anything more could be said Bertois, the proprietor, hurried from behind his desk, and grabbing Bill by the shoulder, uttered an oath, and dragged him to a door at the end of the hall. Unfastening the door with his latch-key he gave Bill a vigorous shove, and the intoxicated man, stumbling over some object, fell heavily to the floor. Banging the door, Bertois turned to the basement stairway just around the corner, and in a sharp voice called "Sam." Sam immediately responded to the call.

"How in the —— did Bill Bird get out of there."

"Didn't know 'e was out, sir," was the reply.

"Did you give anybody your key?"

"Hi did not, sir."

"Well, then, you must have left the door unlocked; mind you don't let any more of them d—— fools out."

As calmly as was possible the missioner protested against the treatment Bill received.

"What would you do with them? Would you want them around the house?" was the gruff reply. "Give them a bed? Not much! We don't keep beds for that brand. The only thing you can do is to kick 'em into the snake-room. You don't know anything about Bill's kind. He's seeing life; them fellows have been counting on this blow-out for months."

An hour or so later the missioner found Sam alone in the basement. The old man was worthy of a better job than the doing of the dirtiest and most objectionable work around a lumber-town hotel, but times had gone hard with him of late years, and his few relatives were on the other side of the Atlantic.

"No, sir, hit ain't the kind of place hi expected to be in at my hage, but beggars mustn't be choosers, you know, sir, and after hi cut me foot half off with a hax I ad to take wot I could get, especially as me rheumatiz bothered me a lot. Wot's the snake-room like, did you say? Hit just depends oo's hin it. Hit's chuck full these days, I'm sorry to say, and it hain't a sight yer reverence would like to see. You want a peep hin, eh? Well, hi don't know as how you'd be allowed; the boss is rather perticlar about who sees 'is customers hin the snake-room. It hain't a very good hadvertisement, hin my opinion."

Nevertheless Sam agreed, if the territory was clear, to show the missioner the snake-room. By way of apology, the old man explained that he had often told his boss that it was a shame to put men into such a place without any kind of bed, with no food, and frequently, in decidedly cold weather, without any heat.

When the opportunity afforded itself, Sam and the missioner went quietly upstairs and, unseen, entered the snake-room. Accustomed as he had been to see the effects of alcohol and evil-living, the scene before the visitor was a fresh and terrible revelation of their destructive power.

The room was probably fifteen feet square. Its furnishings consisted of one table and two framed pictures—the latter being advertisements of "popular brands of whiskies," which were said to have "stood the test for nearly one hundred years." Some results of the test were upon the floor.

In order to get inside, Sam had pushed hard against the door, crowding back the feet of the man nearest. There was scarcely more floor space than the two men needed to stand on. Curses, snores and groans came from the filthy, stench-laden mass of men that covered the floor. Several boards in the wainscotting were spattered with human blood. One man with a recently made gash across his forehead was lying on his side, and with eyes closed, kept striking out with his fist, sometimes hitting the leg of an old man who seemed absolutely paralysed with liquor, and sometimes hitting the partition. Every blow was accompanied by profanity.

Partly under the table lay two camp cooks. One of them, Heinrich Lietzmann, was a most generous individual, and a great favourite with his fellow-workers. Because of his appearance he was dubbed "Roly-Poly" Lietzmann. His broken English was very attractive, and nothing pleased the younger men better than to "get him going" on international politics. Judging from his terribly bruised face, he had either fallen heavily or been in a fight. Poor Heinrich made several attempts to raise himself to a sitting posture, each time falling back with a disturbing effect on the men nearest him, and receiving therefore their muttered curses, which he returned in full measure.

Along the table, on his back, lay Chris. Rogers. Nobody knew the history of Chris. although, because of a remarkable gift of speech which he manifested when excited by liquor, the report that he had once been a "shyster lawyer" in a Western State was generally believed. He was far above the average lumber-jack in knowledge, but far below in vice. After the discovery of an unusually mean trick, Bill Bird had, in the opinion of the camp, fittingly described Chris. when he said, "That dirty rascal is so near mongrel dog, that if he had a bit more hair on him he'd start running rabbits." Just why Chris. had been given charge of the camp stores was a mystery, but for nearly two years he had held the position. He was a slender, wiry man with a singularly repulsive face. His teeth were gone, and his long pointed moustache drooped alongside of the hard mouth that was continually stained with tobacco juice. His coat and vest were plastered with grease from careless eating and his whole appearance suggested a dirty demon-possessed man.

Bill Bird, the fighter, had managed to get into a corner, and was sitting with arms on knees and drooping head—a picture of wretchedness. Once he managed to look up, and for a moment gazed in a dazed way at the missioner: "By God! I wish I was dead:" then there was a prolonged cry of the word "Oh," as of a man in great agony. A few of the stupefied men roused themselves enough to utter a curse in Bill's direction. Gazing once more at the missioner, Bill cried out: "Oh! oh! the devil's got me for sure."

Sam laid his hand on the missioner's arm; "We'd better slip out now, sir, or there might be trouble."

With a sigh and a heavy heart the missioner passed into the hall and up to the room he had been occupying for ten days. With a whispered cry, "How long, O Lord, how long?" he fell on his knees at his bedside, and then in silence he pleaded with his God that at least Bill Bird might be released from the grip of the Evil One.

After the regular service that night, a few Christian people met for prayer. The missioner confided in those present, and with sadness told of his visit with Sam to the snake-room. "What are we doing," he asked, "either as a church or as individuals, for these men? Has Satan any opposition from us as he enslaves our fellow-countrymen? Surely it is not a matter of indifference to us when these men are wrecking their own and other lives, in dens of vice that have been allowed to plant themselves in this town, and that can only thrive as manhood and womanhood are debased?

"Several lumbermen in this district say that in the past fifteen years there has been a steady deterioration in the men employed in the woods. After every payday, by their debauchery, seventy-five per cent. unfit themselves for the work to be done, and take from two to eight weeks to get back to normal condition. There is much that may and must be done along social lines if we are going to arrest these degrading influences, but in the meantime is it not possible for us as individuals to get into personal touch with some of these boys, and throw around them the protection of our Christian friendship and hospitality? Preaching is not the only means for advancing the Kingdom. So much may be done if Christian people will put themselves and their possessions at the service of humanity, and learn to love the lowest as well as the best of the race. Some of these lumber-jacks might go back to camp changed men if we gave God a fair chance to use us. Perhaps some of you business men, or some of you ranchers, could get alongside of at least one poor fellow from that snake-room, and live for his reclamation. There are many ways of keeping in touch with these men, even when they return to the bush, and, in this land of investments, you would find nothing yield such a dividend as the investment of your time in the attractive presentation of the love and power of Jesus Christ. Will you at least make the effort, and leave the results to your Master?" The words were spoken and the question asked with an earnestness that had been intensified by the heart-rending appeal of the broken manhood that the speaker knew was represented by what he had looked upon in the snake-room.

In the prayerful atmosphere and the silence that followed the question, one man said in his heart, "I will." That man was George Clarke.

George Clarke had a small ranch a short distance from the town. He was one of the most industrious men in the Province, but his industry had not resulted in the prosperity that most of his neighbours enjoyed. He had met with enough reverses to absolutely dishearten the average man, but he had borne them all bravely, keeping his disposition unsoured, and his character clean. His extreme reticence, however, often led strangers to misjudge him, and to underestimate his worth. In public affairs he treated himself as though he had no right to anything but the most inferior position, and to have given expression to his own opinion before even a small audience would, in his own judgment, have resulted fatally. Once, under great pressure, he had consented to pass the collection plate at a church service, but after getting on his feet, "everything was a blur." The boys at the rear vowed that he stumbled against every bench-end but one, and that by the time he was half way down the aisle "he didn't know which side of the plate should be up." In replacing the plate on the organ, to the great surprise of the organist, he unceremoniously deposited most of the offering in her lap, and was too much overcome with embarrassment to assist her in replacing it. During the closing hymn he made his escape to a quiet spot in the bush, where he could wipe his profusely perspiring brow and where he could solemnly promise himself not to be entrapped again. But despite his reticence he was an exceptionally intelligent man, and when any individual could get George to express himself on questions of importance, it was not long before "this is what George Clarke thinks," was passed from mouth to mouth throughout the community. All through the years he had resided in the West he had been absolutely upright in his dealings and conduct, and though his reticence prevented him from taking an aggressive part in certain moral reforms that were advocated from time to time, yet there was never a shadow of a doubt as to which side he would be on. The cynical individual who stated that "every man has his price," was compelled to make an exception in the case of George Clarke.

And so it will not be deemed irreverent if we say that when George Clarke said in his heart "I will," God knew he could trust him.

Very thoughtfully George passed, with his wife, from the meeting out into the darkness. "I'm going to look for Bill Bird, Mary, and if I get him I'll bring him home—how would it do if you go on with the Frasers?" The suggestion was all that Mrs. Clarke needed, and her neighbours, without any questioning, cheerfully made room for her in their democrat.

George halted several times on his way to the hotel shed where his horse and buggy had been left—he was wondering how best to carry out his resolve. That resolve was to do his utmost to help Bill Bird to a new life. Years ago in the East he had been on very friendly terms with the Bird family, and though he had once or twice tried to show Bill a kindness, yet he knew he had not measured up to his opportunities and he felt condemned. Quietly he walked down the roadway to the rear of the Imperial Hotel. The shouts and oaths of the drinking and the drunken, and the clatter of glassware reached his ears as he passed along. Was Bill still inside, and if so, how could he get hold of him? A side door opened, and George stepped back into the deep shadow of the building. Bertois, the proprietor, and some man whom George did not know, came to the step and stood in the light for a moment. Then the door was pulled to, and the men stood silent as if listening to assure themselves they were alone. Under ordinary circumstances George would have spoken to Bertois, but this night he deemed it wiser to remain unobserved. The men conversed in low tones at first, but after a while Bertois' words reached him:

"Don't play too swift a game for a start: give 'em plenty of bait; they'll keep on biting till we land 'em. We can easily clear five hundred from those three suckers if you watch yourself. Dick knows the drinks to dish out. Here's for luck! Come on."

Re-entering they closed the door quietly, and George still waited, hoping that Sam would come out, and that the old man might be persuaded to get Bill Bird into the yard. Many times during the next fifteen minutes the door opened, and each time George Clarke got, in some form or other, information of the hell that was inside. The hour was late, yet he felt he must remain longer. Bill Bird was in his keeping, for like those near the blind beggar of old, George had heard the call from the Great Physician, "Bring him hither to Me."

To face the crowd of men he knew would be inside the hotel was more than he felt equal to, and he knew that in all probability any attempt to get Bill out under such circumstances would fail.

Once more the side door opened—this time slowly and unsteadily. A man leaned against the jamb for a few seconds as if needing support. Then some one from within slammed the door against him, and he slipped heavily down to the narrow platform. There was a curse and a drunken hiccough, and then the words the missioner had heard were uttered again, "By God, I wish I was dead."

George Clarke did not immediately recognize the voice, but he did immediately step near to his needy brother-man, and said sympathetically, "What's the matter, mate?"

Taken by surprise the man asked, "Who in the —— are you?"

George recognized the voice and the form and said, "I'm George Clarke, and I'm your friend, Bill Bird." His hand was laid upon the shoulder of the sickened man, and in a kindly voice he persuaded him to accompany him to his home. "The place here is crowded, and we've got lots of room at our place and can give you a comfortable bunk for the night: come along, Bill, for old time's sake."

Linking his arm in Bill's, he led the staggering man to the drive-shed, and after some difficulty and a few arguments, got him safely into his buggy, and not a soul in the place was the wiser.

Mrs. Clarke was a worthy helpmeet for George, and though her household cares were many, she grudged no extra labour that would please her husband and help a fellow-being. And so everything necessary for the comfort of the fallen man had been done. A supper had been prepared, and the guest-room made ready. Bill ate as freely as his condition would allow, and then very willingly acted on the suggestion that he should "creep in." George gave the dirty, tired, whiskey-soaked man such assistance as he felt would be advisable. Once Bill raised his heavy eyelids and appeared to be trying to understand the "why" of things. "This is no place for me, George Clarke—by God, no!" The body wobbled wearily, and Bill could think and talk no more. And so with most of his clothes on, filthy from his stay in the snake-room, Bill Bird was placed in the best bed in the best room of one of the truest homes with which the district was blessed.

Before retiring himself, George Clarke went to a wicker-basket in the parlour, and searched through the family collection of photographs. At last he found the one he sought. It was of the Bird family, and was taken shortly before the oldest boys went West. George took it out to his wife, who was still working in the kitchen. Pointing to the face of a bright manly boy who stood with hand upon his mother's shoulder, he said to his wife, "If Bertois and his gang changed a boy's face as terribly as Bill's has been changed, and did it in a few minutes, they would be sent to the 'pen' for five years, and yet we let that same gang take their time on the job, and do it in hundred lots, and scarcely raise so much as a finger to stop it—and I'm as guilty as the rest of them. Poor Bill! he used to be as decent a little chap as you could find in the County of Addington."

The photograph was returned to the parlour, and dropped somewhat carelessly upon the table, but the unthinking, and yet perhaps not unguided act was the first of many influences that brought better days to Bill Bird.

Long into the morning the occupant of the guest-room slept on. George Clarke had opened the door quietly at breakfast time, but the heavy breathing caused him to leave the wearied man undisturbed. About the middle of the forenoon, after much yawning and stretching, Bill's consciousness slowly returned.

He pushed back the white coverlets and gazed around the room. Many times he had awakened in a drive-shed, twice in the police cell, more than once in the "snake-room." But this morning everything was different. What had happened? Was he dreaming? The room was the most attractively furnished of any he had slept in for years, and his soiled clothes on the chair at the bedside were strangely out of harmony with the surroundings.

He had confused memories of events since he came out of the camp, but he knew he had spent his money in the way most of his earnings had gone for the last few years, and he condemned himself for having been a fool again. With a half-consciousness of some one being near, he looked to the opposite side of the room.

The bedroom door had been quietly opened and a bright "good-morning" greeted him. There need be no hurry, he was told, but whenever he was ready he might just as well have a bite of breakfast.

No word was spoken in explanation of his presence, nor in regard to the trouble George had had in getting him away from the "Imperial" the night before. Slowly and with mingled feelings of embarrassment and disgust, Bill attempted to clean himself up a little. He knew he was in George Clarke's home, and in his own words, "felt like a fool and looked the part to perfection."

It was not easy to face those he knew had befriended him, for sin had not yet lost its shame to Bill Bird.

His bedroom door opened into the parlour, and he stood alone for a few seconds. Then his eyes fell on the old photograph. His hands trembled as he held it and gazed into the faces of mother and brothers and sister. Pictures of the old home and of happy family relationships of past years crowded themselves upon his memory.

He remembered how his widowed mother had toiled and struggled to bring up her six boys aright and give them the best equipment possible for the battle of life. He recalled his own setting out from home—from the home to which he had never returned, and to which he had rarely written. The "Western fever" had gripped him in his early twenties, and nothing could induce him to stay on the Homestead. And so ere long the property had to pass into other hands, because there were no boys left to work the place. The mother's sorrow over the parting with her "Willie" had rested very lightly on him the morning he started Westward. Yet to-day he viewed it in a different light, and he lived the parting over again with very different feelings. The last breakfast had been prepared in silence by the one who had never ceased to love him.

More than once she had tried to speak, but the lump in the throat prevented. At last they stood in the hall, and her words were uttered with sobs as she clung to her "baby boy." "Good-bye, my Willie, and remember, that as long as your mother has breath she will pray every day for her boy, and ask God to take care of him." He had assured her he could take care of himself. He remembered the last flutter of the handkerchief as she stood on the milk-stand watching the buggy disappear from the sideroad on to the "gravel." He had "taken care of himself," and a mighty poor job he had made of it, and there seemed little chance of any improvement.

While he was in the midst of such thoughts, George Clarke entered. Bill was still holding the photograph. With moistened eyes he looked into the face of his hospitable friend. "George Clarke," he commenced, "it takes a man a long time to own up that he has made a botch of things; it's too late now to make a fresh start, but I've been looking at this picture, and God knows I'd like to have as good a character as I had when that was taken. That woman is as good a mother as any boys ever had, and I haven't shown her the gratitude of a dog."

To this day, George Clarke feels that he never made a poorer attempt at trying to speak a helpful word to a discouraged man than on the morning when Bill Bird stood in his little parlour on the old ranch. One result of the conversation, however, was the decision on Bill's part to accept the invitation to remain at the Clarke ranch for at least a few weeks, and during those weeks he saw demonstrated the best type of Christian living with which he had ever come in contact. On several occasions he accompanied George to the hall in which the special services were being held. Rather to the surprise of the Clarkes, he made no response to the appeals from the missioner, which seemed to them so powerful. One Sabbath evening, however, as they sat around the stove, Bill expressed himself in such a way as to bring a thrill of joy to the hearts of those who were greatly concerned in seeing him make the "Choice of the Highest."

"George Clarke," said Bill, "I haven't taken much stock in religion, but if there's a kind that makes a man do what you and your missus did for me when I wasn't fit company for a pig, I guess I ought to go in for it." Then in a lower and subdued tone he added, "For anybody to take an interest in me is a stunner, the dirty tough that I was."

It was Bill's own opinion that for him life in the bush was no longer safe, and so, until his future was fully decided, he agreed to assist the Clarkes with the work on the ranch. When a few months later, through the death of a brother in the East, George Clarke decided to make his home in Nova Scotia, Bill Bird said in effect, "Where thou goest, I will go."

And it so happens that to-day, down by the Eastern sea, the former lumber-jack is building a home, a business and a character. He has not again returned West, but he has often told intimate friends that there is a rancher's small home in the distant province which he never forgets; and he thanks God for those who valued a dirty, wrecked, but God-loved man more than furniture and carpets, and whose hospitality and service awakened desires that have transformed a life.

But it was not to Bill Bird alone that an uplift came. Let George Clarke speak for himself. His words were spoken as he renewed his acquaintance with the missioner two years later. The audience had dispersed, and George and the speaker walked down the street of the little fishing village. Bill Bird was the main subject of their conversation. For a long time they stood in the darkness as George narrated all that had transpired after the missioner's departure from the Western town. When his story was ended, the missioner clasped his hand and said, "God bless you, Clarke, for what you did in Bill's behalf. If only we could multiply that kind of effort we could redeem this dominion."

George clung to the extended hand as he said, "You are very good, sir, to say that to me, but I tell you honestly, when I tried to do that little bit for Bill Bird, I did a deal more for George Clarke. I have had my ups and downs as you know. Since I've been in the East I've done pretty well on the whole, but honestly, sir, the palmiest days I've ever had, and the best returns my bank-book ever showed, are as nothing in value compared to the satisfaction that came to me and my wife when we saw Bill Bird solidly on his feet as a Christian man. If you're going back by the Intercolonial, try to stop over at C——. Bill would be mighty glad to see you, and you'll see what the Lord can do with a man who has gone even as far as the "snake-room."

CHAPTER XI

THE BUSH FIRE

"Bush fires are said to be raging throughout the vicinity of Lundville."

This bulletin was one of several occupying the boards in front of "The Journal" building in Carlton Mines—a British Columbia mining town. As Lundville was thirty miles south-west, no unusual anxiety was felt by those who read the brief announcement about noon-tide on an August day. The atmosphere had been heavy with smoke for the past forty-eight hours; but that was not at all uncommon during that month.

By nightfall, however, the town was enveloped in a dense cloud of smoke; and from the roofs of high buildings on the outskirts the atmosphere seemed to be penetrated by the lurid glow of the raging fires which now extended for several miles. Telephone communication with Lundville had been impossible since noon, and from Burnt River, only fifteen miles away, the last message received told of the whole population being engaged in a desperate effort to effectively check the fire which threatened to wipe out the village.

From Burnt River to Carlton Mines there were unbroken timber lands, a fact which caused deep anxiety to many of the inhabitants of the mining town. Not a few retired that night with forebodings that made anything but fitful and troubled sleep impossible. Many were the fervent hopes that ere morning the heavens might open and send forth an abundance of rain upon the sapless woods and withered grasses. Nothing but a heavy downpour of several hours' duration would penetrate the parched earth far enough to quench the fire which was well into the root-filled soil.

Fire rangers, assisted by many citizens, including nearly a hundred miners, spent the night in the woods at the edge of the town, cutting down as much bush as was possible, and clearing it away from such points as were considered dangerous connecting links with Carlton Mines. By dawn it was felt that the night's hard toil and the precautions taken had left the town fairly secure.

Shortly after daylight, however, the rough trail into Carlton Mines was dotted for miles with settlers hurrying distractedly, they scarcely knew where, before the cruel flames that had driven them from their homes, and that had by this time destroyed those homes and many other results of several years of hard labour.

All sorts of vehicles, from home-made toy wagons to dump-carts and ranch-wagons were loaded with household effects, some of which had to be left behind, when a few hours later, all that most people could hope to save was life itself.

By six o'clock, fire, church, and schoolbells clanged out their general alarm, calling every available citizen to the fire-fighting, that perchance united effort might save the town. Already huge sparks were raining upon the southwest section, but fortunately in that section the shacks and buildings were few and far between. Yet it was soon apparent that the fire-fighters could not hold their position, even there, but would have to take up a fresh stand nearer the town's centre. Every household was on guard; tubs, barrels, pails, milkcans and kitchen utensils were filled with water, and for a time the falling sparks were quenched almost as quickly as they fell. Straddle-legged on the ridge of the roofs in the fire zone, boys and men with dampened clothes were kept busy extinguishing the sparks that would so easily ignite shingles upon which no rain had fallen for five weeks.

Throughout these long anxious hours, when men were toiling side by side for the protection of their town and their homes, no man had acquitted himself more worthily than the stalwart minister of St. Paul's Church. Until that night no one knew how he could make the chips fly from the tree trunk, and when the most needed work was the turning over of sods to arrest the fire running through the dry grass, no hands were readier than those of the Reverend Walter Nicholson, and when his palms began to blister and to peel, no one knew of it except himself.

When, after the general alarm, reinforcements arrived, he felt he could no longer leave his loved ones without some word of the probable and immediate danger. Stopping at only one or two homes on the way, he hastened to the manse. Despite the seriousness of the situation, Mrs. Nicholson could not restrain her laughter, as her husband stood, coatless and vestless, at the door of the dining-room. Pieces of coarse string had been substituted for certain important buttons which had been lost in his strenuous activity at the fire-fighting. The all-night's toil in the dirt and the smoke, amidst falling ashes, had transformed the immaculately clean husband into a dirt-begrimed labourer.

"It looks as if the town was doomed, Jess," he commenced. "The brewery's gone (though that's no particular loss), and a number of shacks are already burnt down. I must get right back with the men, but in the meantime you'd better get what you value most into a couple of valises. You'll need a few extra clothes for the youngsters and yourself. Put my marginal bible and my black suit in if you can. It's of no use trying to take much, as we may have to foot it for quite a distance. The 'Eastbound' hasn't come in yet, and it's hard to get any information because the wires are down, but it looks as if some of the bridges had been burned, so there isn't much hope of getting out by rail. You can count on me being back in about half an hour."

Mrs. Nicholson, as a bride, had brought to her Western home the handiwork of three busy years, and when the furnishing had been completed and her "extras" tastefully arranged, the minister and his young wife had looked with grateful pride upon the attractiveness of the manse. During the ten subsequent years her enthusiasm in keeping that home orderly, clean and cosy, had never failed. And now she had less than half an hour in which to select what she most desired from that home that had become endeared by ten years of effort to keep it, as it had been kept, a radiant centre of helpfulness—and that selection from their entire earthly possessions must fit the narrow compass of two valises.

The reader who is able to imagine Mrs. Nicholson's feelings on that memorable nineteenth day of August will readily believe that a few minutes were lost in the feeling of helplessness as to what was best to select. A glance through the window at the smoke-filled street, and occasional sparks, put an end to her hesitancy. Whatever was to be done must be done quickly. Her husband's request was first complied with, then such clothing as she and the children might need was included, and a small supply of food for immediate needs. Within a few minutes she had gathered together the few articles of jewellery she possessed, a package of business papers, a bit of silverware, one or two photographs, and an "encyclopædic" scrapbook which contained, among many other interesting items, several newspaper clippings of the work and doings of the Rev. W. Nicholson. From her much-prized secretary, a Christmas gift from the children in her Sunday School class, she took a locket in which was a small curl of hair—her mother's hair.

In her hurried packing she had not forgotten that at least two things must be included from her box of relics and sentimental treasures in the attic. The first pair of baby shoes ever worn in the manse were among Mrs. Nicholson's most valued reminders of the happy days spent in caring for Baby Dorothy—now a bright girl of eight years. Whenever a visit had been made to the box in the attic, the little shoes were always taken out and looked upon with a loving smile.

There were many other articles of much greater value than what was Mrs. Nicholson's final selection, but she could not leave "dear little Hugh's favourite toy." How he had loved that little horse! Even after the terrible accident that had left the "gee gee" noseless, nothing could ever displace it in his affections. For at least a year it had shared his bed without one night's exception, and though it was usually taken from his arms after the little lad had fallen asleep, it was always placed on the chair at the bed-side, so that on awakening he might immediately find his valued wooden friend. And when, during his long and fatal illness, he was unable to take an interest in any other toys, the wasted hand would rest for hours across the back of the broken toy horse. And so the noseless little animal, with its stand minus two wheels, found a place among the most valued things that were chosen from the well-furnished manse when but a brief half-hour was given in which to make a final choice.

The thirty minutes had not fully elapsed when Mr. Nicholson came rushing in to say there was not a moment to lose. The wind by this time had increased well-nigh to a hurricane, and no force of men could have protected the buildings from the fiery embers that were being hurled in large quantities in all directions.

Walter Nicholson went forth with the two valises strapped over his shoulders, while on his left arm he carried his eighteen months' old baby boy. Close behind him came his wife with a few extra wraps thrown over one arm, and her free hand clasping that of the trembling little Dorothy. Thus the Nicholson family departed from the manse, that twelve hours later was nothing but a heap of smouldering ashes.

The streets were filled with terror-stricken people laden with such of their worldly possessions as their strength would allow. The fierce wind hastened them on in their frenzied race for life. Shouts, shrieks, agonized cries and prayers greeted the ears of the minister and his wife as they joined the homeless throng on the streets of Carlton Mines. "Every house in Freeman's Terrace is burning." "The Methodist Church is ablaze." "The Opera House was on fire when we came by." "Oh, my God! what'll we all do?" "There won't be a house left in town." "God have mercy on us!" Such were the cries from scores of voices in the terrified crowd.

Here and there aged and sick folk were being borne in the arms of loved ones or neighbours, although each one rendering such willing service knew that the delay involved was imperilling his own life. Perhaps the saddest sight in the whole sad procession was that of a poor Italian woman, whose little girl had died the previous morning. The father was working in a construction gang several miles away, and the word of the child's death had not yet reached him. When the fire had spread to the humble dwelling, the distracted and sorrow-stricken mother could not endure the thought of leaving her darling to the devouring flames. Tenderly lifting the little one from the casket, she wrapped a shawl around the lifeless form and struggled with her burden alongside of some who knew not what she carried. Cries and prayers in her native tongue were intermingled with her broken English.

Walter Nicholson had forgotten for the moment that the previous afternoon he had heard of the poor woman's sorrow and had fully intended to at least call and offer such sympathy and help as was possible. But the call to the fire-fighting had caused everything else to be put aside. When, however, he heard the pathetic wail, "Oh, ma Annetta, ma leetle Annetta," and glanced at the strange-looking bundle the Italian woman was carrying, he at once surmised the meaning of it all.

Burdened and anxious though he was, he walked alongside of the lonely mother that he might share her burden also. The sad-eyed woman looked into his face, and in an appealing tone said, "Please not mak' her go from me—

ma dear leetle Annetta. Da father, he no come yet. Oh! he must come first!" Walter Nicholson hurriedly readjusted his baggage and then held his baby boy so as to leave his right arm free to give the poor Italian woman such support as was possible. The assistance given was only slight, but his sympathetic words and the touch of his hand soothed a little the aching heart of one who felt that day the loneliness of a bereaved stranger in a strange land.

Information was passed through the fleeing crowd that the work-train was taking the people out of danger as rapidly as possible, and that the best course to pursue was to make for the railway station. In any case, the railway track eastward would be the safest highway down the Pass, as the mountain stream two miles away might be reached on foot if necessary. A place of at least temporary protection would be found there.

Before the station-house was reached, another member was added to the Nicholson party. A lad of not more than five years had either wandered away from his home before his friends had felt the necessity to leave, or had become separated from them on the way. At any rate, he was doing his very best to make everybody acquainted with the fact that he was lost. To attempt to locate his friends was out of the question. Mrs. Nicholson bent over him for a moment, and her words and looks produced a quieting effect on the little lad, who at once did as he was bidden, and clung to one of the wraps on the arm of his newly-found guardian.

By the time the railway station was reached the fire had made such headway that it would have been impossible to make a safe return as far as the manse, which had been left less than fifteen minutes before. The frame buildings of which most of the town was composed made the onrush of the flames the more rapid.

The station platform was packed with an impatient crowd awaiting the return of the work-train which had already made two trips as far as the coke-ovens at Twyford. The line was single track, and the only rolling-stock available consisted of an antiquated engine and two dingy passenger cars with rough board seats lengthwise beneath the windows. The morning of the fire there had been added to these cars a few open coal trucks. The old engine could not make the grades with anything but a light train, so that it was seen by many how improbable it was that all those then waiting could find transportation before the buildings around them would be licked up by the approaching fire. Surrounding roofs had been saturated by the station fire-hose, but the gauge-ball on the water-tank was rapidly lowering, and the engineer at the pump-house had been compelled to leave his post half an hour before, so that at best their protection by water was a matter of only an hour or so.

Yet it needed no small amount of courage to isolate oneself from the throng and to pass out of sight in that heavy cloud of smoke which prevented one seeing more than a short distance ahead. The fire now seemed to have gained headway in other directions, so that even if they went forth they might soon find themselves in a position where advance and retreat were alike impossible. Frequent explosions and loudly crackling timbers added to the anxiety of those who awaited the return of the work-train.

The Rev. Walter Nicholson was soon surrounded by a group of those anxious to hear any suggestion he had to make. The Station Agent assured him that even if the track remained clear, at least two additional trips would need to be made before all on the platform could be removed to a place of safety. "Then the wires are dead, Mr. Nicholson, and we've no news of any other train being on the way, so there isn't a minute to spare." He explained that the station-yard might be a comparatively safe place for a while, yet, in view of the extent of the fire, those remaining might find themselves hemmed in and have difficulty in getting over the burned and burning earth for many hours. Several buildings west of the station had already collapsed, blocking certain portions of the road-bed.

A number decided to follow the minister's lead and start on the journey along the eastward track. Mrs. Nicholson refused to remain for the train, preferring to share the fortunes or misfortunes of her husband, while the poor Italian woman, still clinging to her precious burden, followed every move her sympathizer made. Would she not wait and try to get on the train?

"Oh, no, please me walk wid you. I will be so strong!" Even the little lad refused to be transferred to the care of others, and as none were particularly anxious to add to their responsibilities, there was nothing for it but to take him along. It was no easy task that the Nicholsons had undertaken. The usual heat of mid-August was intensified by many miles of burning bush, while the smoke added greatly to the discomfort. Then the poorly ballasted track made walking exceedingly tiresome. Yet no complaints were uttered: even the children realized that every effort must be made to reach the stream before the resistless enemy overtook them. Little more than half a mile had been covered when the whistle and rumble of the work-train announced that it was returning for its third load of passengers. A glance at the cars as the train passed was sufficient to show that fire had broken out further east, at some point between the pedestrians and Twyford. The old paint was covered with blisters, and many of the windows were badly cracked through intense heat. A few minutes later the train returned with every foot of space occupied, even to the steps of cars and engine. A number of passengers tried to let their slower fellow-travellers know that the station-house was in flames, but the noise from the train drowned most of their words.

The inhabitants of Carlton Mines who had not driven or walked out earlier in the day or been conveyed on the railway were now hastening to the limit of their powers in the direction of Twyford. Fortunately for the almost exhausted pastor, the last half-mile of his journey was made a trifle easier by the voluntary assistance of a rugged Galician girl who had been well known at the manse. One small coarse bag contained her few belongings, and accustomed as she had been to long walks and heavy loads when she had lived on the Saskatchewan prairie, the carrying of the baby boy would make small difference to her.

And so at last the mountain stream was reached, and after crossing the bridge the wearied refugees laid down their burdens on the pebbly bed at the water's edge. At that point the width of the open space between the stream-divided bush was only about a hundred feet, so that in case the fire continued its course the danger would still be very great. Already they had seen showers of sparks carried much farther than the short distance that separated the banks between which they stood, and there was every probability that the timber on each side of the stream would be ablaze simultaneously.

But to continue their flight through the thick bush that lined both sides of the track for miles might be to place themselves in a much worse plight. Where they now stood was an abundance of water, and fortunately it was shallow enough to make it safe for all to stand in the centre when that time became necessary. It would then be a matter of endurance against the stifling heat.

Within five minutes the number of those seeking refuge at the stream side was considerably over a hundred. The Station Agent was the last one to arrive, and reported that when the third train-load was leaving the railway yards, and the station-house was seen to be on fire, everyone had immediately set out on foot. He had kept in the rear to be sure that no one was missing.

Except for an attempt on the part of some to safeguard certain belongings by burying them in the gravel, there was nothing to do but wait—and to many the moments seemed as hours. It was a race between old Dave Minehan, the driver on the antiquated engine from the East, and the devouring elements from the southwest. Which would reach them first? A few men acted as sentinels, and paced the track to discover the progress of the fire. The wind had dropped a little, but the flames were still making rapid headway, and very soon no report was needed from the outposts—the fire's own voice could be heard only too plainly. The agent figured out that the work-train had been due over ten minutes—something must have happened! Surely the train-crew realized the need of the courageous ones who had voluntarily walked, and of the others for whom no accommodation was possible.

Flames were now visible to all who were close to the bridge, and the scorching heat, the stifling smoke, and the ash-laden wind combined to make waiting almost unendurable. Brows of fainting ones were being bathed in the merciful stream, and the strongest were becoming fearful.

"Thank God, she's coming!" The shout was from the throat of the Station Agent who had been down the track listening for the return of the work-train. The words had scarcely ended when the shrill whistle from the little engine confirmed the statement.

When a few days later a number of men were discussing the disaster, one of them spoke for each individual at the stream when he said, "Say! I used to hate that blooming raspy whistle, but that day it was the finest bit of music I ever heard."

Dave Minehan slowed up as he neared the bridge, and the Agent signalled him to stop, and at once scrambled aboard to let him know that everybody had reached the bridge and that there was no need to try to go farther. Old Dave was trembling with excitement and irritation, but just then he had no time to tell of the fretful delay over a hot box, and all the trouble entailed in putting in a new "brass" at Twyford—and neither then nor later did he tell of the terrible strain that he had endured in taking his train through a piece of blazing bush three miles down.

The eager, frightened people were rushing up the banks, but Dave kept his train moving until it was about midway on the bridge. From the cab he shouted to them to "keep off." The moment he brought his train to a standstill he leaped from his engine and again thundered the same prohibition. Sharply he yelled to the men to line up and form a bucket-brigade. The fireman passed a dozen buckets from the tender, and Dave, with harsh and hasty commands, got the men on their job. For about five minutes, with a rapidity that would have done credit to a trained brigade, the double line passed the buckets and old Dave dashed the water over such portions of the cars as in his judgment needed the protection. In the meantime he had ordered the rest of the men to soak a few camp blankets that he had taken the precaution to bring along. "There's one bad spot where you'll maybe need to cover yourselves a bit: it'll be raining fire by when we get back—better give your coats and hats a dip too, boys! Get a move on!"

It was no longer possible to remain on the bridge. The old engineer shouted "All aboard," and hurried back to his engine. The women and children were rushed into the passenger car. At one end stood the Nicholsons, while in the corner the bereaved Italian mother sat with her lifeless child. More than once had the minister felt that he must insist on her leaving her burden behind, but each time that he glanced at the sad face and saw the passionate pleading of her eyes, and observed the tender clasp of the mother arms, his courage deserted him.

The last foot was scarcely off the ground when old Dave reversed the lever and opened the throttle, and with a jerk the train started once more.

Let the brakeman tell the story of the return trip, as we heard it from his lips months after in one of the temporary buildings that had arisen among the ashheaps of Carlton Mines.

"Yes, siree, you just bet it kept me firing that morning. The west-bound express was away late, or it could have got the whole crowd out in two trips. I never thought "Old 98" would stand the gait she did that day. On that last trip we hit a clip both ways that would make your hair stand. Davie was bound to get them people to Twyford. We got a scorching on the up-trip let me tell you. Gosh! it seemed like we was running through Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. I wondered if Davie would face the return trip, 'cause the blaze was getting worse every minute. I moved over to him and asked him if he was going to try it. Whew! I wish you could have seen him! He hadn't cooled off from the mad he had on at Twyford. We had to put a 'brass' on the front car, and when the boys down there couldn't find their jackscrews, Davie got rip-tearing mad, 'cause he knew what the rest of the crowd at Carlton was up against, and he was scared he might be too late. Well, sir, he dumped all the bad language what was in his system on me. It was the kind you don't put in mother's letter. He finished up with the sickliest kind of smile I ever set eyes on, and yelled, 'You —— fool: do you think I'm up here on a Sunday School picnic? But Davie knew what was what when we reached the bridge. He lined up the bosses and parsons and the rest of that crowd like he was a British General. And he got his orders obeyed in double-quick time too.

"But it was that last down-trip that this child won't need a diary to remember by! Gee! you know that curve about a mile and a half below the bridge? Well, we'd got most all the head on we could carry, and I was feeling about as safe as if I was having a smoke on a can of dynamite. I was watching for Dave to slow up for the curve, but blame me if he didn't open the throttle another notch.

"As Billy S—— would say, 'Religion isn't my long suit,' but I got ready to say my prayers; I backed up a bit into the coal-bunker, and gripped the side of the tender, and I told the Almighty I hadn't bothered Him much for a long time, but that if He'd keep the cars on the track around the curve I'd be much obliged. Seemed to me like some of them cars jumped clean off the rails, and I thought we were on the home stretch to Kingdomcome, but Davie brought us through O.K. Did we pass through much fire? Well, I should say! There wasn't a rail or post for half a mile that wasn't burning. If it hadn't been for the way Davie soused them cars, and got the fellows to fix their coats and the blankets, we'd never have made it.

"Did you see the watch they gave Davie? Get him to show it to you! It's a dandy—solid gold—got a whole lot of writing on the back—something about 'a tribute to Mr. Dave Minehan's courage and skill in the face of grave danger and difficulty.' He don't say much, but he's as tickled about it as the fellow what got a Christmas-box of sealskin underclothes. Davie's all right, you bet. I'd rather fire for him on 'Old 98' than for any guy I know on a big Mogul. He's a bit rough-like sometimes, but if he can help anybody he's on the job; he'd break his neck to do somebody a good turn."

Such was the brakeman's narration of Dave Minehan's final race on "Old 98," on the day that Carlton Mines was levelled by the bush fire.

* * * * *

The shadows of evening had fallen over Twyford on what is still regarded in Carlton Mines as "disaster day." The afternoon had been a busy one for the inhabitants of the almost verdureless village that is known chiefly for its long lines of coke-ovens. Generous hearts had made shacks and homes have an expansive hospitality that would have seemed incredible before the homeless throng arrived. But after every available lodging device had been resorted to there were many people unprovided for. And so the coke-ovens were the best accommodation that could be offered those still unhoused.

In one of these unusual lodging-houses a candle cast its dim light over the figures of two men and a woman who were kneeling in the attitude of prayer. In one corner a black box rested on two backless chairs. It had been made an hour or two before by the local carpenter, and covered with black cloth by the kindly hands of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholson. Little Annette was to be laid away in the early morning, and this was the best that loving hearts could devise in that place and under those circumstances. The manse valises had made their contribution to the final robing of little Annette, and the weeping mother, looking upon what Christ-like friends had done, clasped and kissed the hands that had dealt so kindly with her and her "leetle Annetta." For nearly eight hours the father had walked seeking his wife, and now they were kneeling together in the presence of their dead child.

Walter Nicholson's voice was tremulous with sympathy as he commended the sorrow-stricken strangers to the all-pitying Father. The mourners did not understand all that was uttered, but they understood the spirit that was manifested and were deeply grateful. A few words of comfort were spoken, and the minister passed out into the darkness to another oven in which his own loved ones were awaiting his return. Mrs. Nicholson was sitting on a box with Dorothy on her knee. Angus and the five-year-old stranger had fallen asleep on the ashy floor. No trace had been discovered of the lad's friends. He could give little information beyond the fact that his name was Hans Kuyper, and that he was "losted." Mrs. Nicholson had quieted the wee chap's fears, by assuring him that his mother would come soon, and though, with darkness at hand and no sign of mother, a few tears had been shed, it was not long before the wearied and worn child was asleep.

The husband and father sat alongside of his loved ones in sympathetic silence for a few minutes. The all-night's toil, the hours of solicitude for others, the heat of the day, the burdens carried, the sympathy extended and the discomforts endured, had combined to produce a feeling of depression. "We have lost everything, Jess: maybe I'll feel better by morning, but to-night I've lost my courage as well as everything else, and I can scarcely bear to think of the future."

Little Dorothy placed herself between her father's knees, and looking lovingly into eyes where the unbidden tears had forced themselves, said quietly, "Isn't it a good thing, daddy, that you haven't lost mamma and Angus and me?"

Walter Nicholson enfolded the child in his big arms and kissed the curl-encircled face. "Yes! God bless you, little sunbeam, that *is* a good thing, and maybe daddy was forgetting. Now let us say the twenty-third Psalm and have our good-night prayer."

With sometimes unsteady voices the three repeated the Psalm they had so often joined in at home under such different circumstances. Then father, mother and child knelt beside the box, and a prayer of thanksgiving and a cry for strength came from a thankful but needy heart. Walter Nicholson's arm rested on Dorothy's shoulder, and his voice quivered again as he thought of the little black box in the near-by oven, and prayed for those to whom the past hours had brought a double sorrow that had left them homeless and childless.

As was her custom, Dorothy offered up her own prayer at her mother's knee. A sweet confidence in religious matters had always existed between child and mother, and there was never any restraint in the expression of the little one's thought toward God. Tired though she was, her "poetry prayers," as she called them, were said in full, and then her own additions followed.

"Thank you for taking care of us all, and we are glad that papa and mamma and Angus and Dorothy are all here. Help the little boy's mamma to find him, and please to take care of the poor Italian woman now that her little girl is gone to heaven. Bless papa and mamma and Angus, and make me a good girl, and please help us to get another home soon, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

The fire had almost spent itself by nightfall, and with the dawn the long-wished-for rain began to fall. By the middle of the forenoon the danger of any further outbreak was past. The construction gang from the East, and a number of section men from the West, were immediately put to work at clearing the track and repairing culverts and bridges.

By the middle of the afternoon a number of men who had fled from the burning town were able to make the return trip. For four or five miles the outlook from the car-windows was a very dreary one. The underbrush had been entirely burned up, and of the standing timber little but charred, jagged remnants of tree-trunks remained. Only here and there had a telegraph pole escaped, and even the protruding ends of many of the railway ties had smouldered to the ballast.

The entire business section of Carlton Mines was destroyed. A few isolated buildings in the residential portion northwest, and a few in the northeast had escaped, but all the rest had been reduced to ashes. What could be done under such circumstances? Who would have the courage to attempt a fresh start and face all the difficulties arising out of such a disaster? Who? *Every man who that afternoon stood gazing at those ash-heaps.* With that inextinguishable optimism that has its headquarters in Western Canada, they began then and there to formulate their plans. Several contracts for rebuilding were signed before night, and ere the ashes were cold, men started to rear a new and better town.

The preacher, with the rest of the impoverished ones, went back to his job. Not only did he assist in clearing away the débris, in preparation for a new church and manse, but many a lift did he give to others who were busily engaged in getting a roof over their heads.

During the months of rebuilding he preached successively in the open-air, in shack-restaurant, sawmill, hotel, opera-house, and finally, after many disappointments and discouragements, in the new church.

Among the interesting contributions received by Mr. Nicholson for the Building Fund, was one from the mother of the boy who was "losted." When on the morning of the fire she was compelled to hastily leave her dwelling, she felt quite sure her little lad was with some of his playmates in a neighbour's home. On the way she discovered that her friends had already departed, but she was still hopeful that her boy was in their care. And so she had very gladly accepted a ride in one of the last vehicles leaving the town, and, after a rough and rapid drive, had reached a mining camp a mile or two south of Twyford. Her friends had gone in a different direction, and it was over twenty-four hours before she found them.

They could give her no news of her lost boy, and she began to fear that he had never left the town. Two days later, without having received any word of his whereabouts, she suddenly saw him, riding "pickaback" with arms twined around the neck of the Rev. Walter Nicholson.

Mr. Nicholson still delights to tell how the mother and child were unexpectedly brought face to face as he was turning the corner of a building. He professes to have confused memories of certain details, but states that before he had a chance to get the lad from his shoulders or extricate himself, he was the centre of the most vigorous hugging and kissing imaginable. When the overjoyed mother learned all that had taken place, her gratitude to those who had befriended her boy was simply unbounded. For some months after the fire she struggled along in a small shack several miles away from Carlton Mines. The following letter from her to Mr. Nicholson is reproduced exactly as written, except for corrections in spelling:

"DEAR SIR,—I shall thank you very much for what you have done to me. Never will I not forget it. It is sorry for me that I not can write much English. Dear Sir, I am well here, but the work is very still and so we not can get money. I went to the church on all the Sunday. I am glad to be a better woman. I wish you my blessing and Hans do it too. After 25th I will send you $1.00 for your another church.—G. KUYPER."

The one dollar arrived in due time, and knowing the sacrifice it involved, it was valued out of all proportion to the amount.

Walter Nicholson's courage in facing the future did not fail. He stayed at his post until his work was completed. To "preach to a procession," as the work in some districts has frequently been described, to face an appalling indifference on the part of some, and a cynical antagonism on the part of others, and to struggle along with an inadequate income, constitutes a task that only the bravest can face year after year, yet in the face of all this he said cheerfully, "I've seen a lot of preachers come and go, but I think God wants me here, and the need is call enough for any man, so here I stay as long as He wills. I've had many rewards, and I thank God I've had the chance to do my bit in this great Westland."

CHAPTER XII

RUTH AND THE PRODIGAL

"Isn't he awful looking, Mother? Why does daddy let him come in so much? I don't like the way the study smells after he's been in."

Little Ruth, of a village manse, made many other observations, and asked many other questions as a poor, wretched-looking man shuffled across the lawn in the early evening of an autumn day.

The mother's smile changed quickly to a look of sadness, and giving the wee girl a kiss, she said, "Mother will tell Ruthie all about it at story-time to-night."

From the Children's Bible Story Book that night the mother read of the Prodigal Son. There were a number of interruptions from the occupant of the little bed: "Why didn't he go home before he got so dreadful hungry, Mother?" "Where was his mother?" "Why did his father run so far?"

After answering many questions the mother continued: "There are lots and lots of prodigal sons still living; men who have been bad, and who then, like some little children who have been naughty, run away from those who love them best. And all the time those who love them are wishing so much that they would come back, and say they are sorry and that they will try to be better. God is our Father, and He loves everybody; you know what we often say when daddy has prayers: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Well, darling, you wanted to know why daddy let poor Mr. Gage come in so often? He lets him come because God would let him come. The poor man thinks that God doesn't want him because he's been so bad, and because he's gone, oh! so far away, and daddy is trying to tell him that God does want him, and that God will take care of him if he will only love Him and trust Him, like you trust daddy and mother to take care of you. Mr. Gage is awful looking because sin is awful, and he has let sin be his master instead of God. But mother's darling will be nice and kind to him, because God loves him, and we must love those whom God loves. Perhaps some day you will see him look as much different as the Prodigal Son looked after he came back home."

Ruth did not altogether forget her mother's words, and when the half-drunken man was brought to the Manse for a meal a little later on in the week, she somewhat timorously handed him two or three asters that she had picked from the garden. John Gage looked a little embarrassed, and at first seemed inclined to leave them in Ruth's possession, but the little hand remained outstretched, and with sweet winsomeness the child told him she had picked them for him.

"Picked them for me! Well, well! then I guess I'll take them. Thank you."

On several occasions, as he sauntered around the village, his attention was arrested by a childish voice calling him by name, so that he came to feel he had a friend in the minister's little girl.

There were many head-shakings among the village wiseacres regarding the minister's interest in John Gage. It was generally agreed that while the preacher was well-meaning enough, his knowledge of human nature was not very keen. The village constable knew John so well that he felt able to speak authoritatively on the matter. "'Tain't no use, young man," he said to the preacher. "We wus talking about him the other day in Cyrus Haag's blacksmith shop, and every man says the same as I do. He's just a-bleeding you, that's all. Five years' hard labour is what he needs; s'long as you'll take care of him when he's drunk, and feed him when he's broke, he'll just bum around. Don't I know the whole bunch? Didn't me and the county constable arrest his father when he pretty nigh murdered Sam Collins? Ain't his brother in Kingston Penitentiary this very minute? The only way to improve them fellers is to hang 'em."

The authoritative information having been given the preacher, there was no further need of sympathy for him if he wilfully rejected the constable's gratuitous, labour-and-money-saving counsel.

And the passing of the weeks seemed to confirm the " 'tain't-no-use" judgment. People living near the Manse reported everything that happened, and a good deal that did not happen, in connection with the visits of John Gage and others of his type, for it was generally known that the preacher was "easy." But the preacher went on with his work, and whatever the results of his efforts might be, nobody ever doubted his belief in the Gospel he preached.

Every Sabbath evening, in some form or other, he dealt with the Fact of Sin and its Soul-destroying power. He knew that "sin and punishment go through the world with their heads tied together," but he knew also, and he preached it as a fact that for him was beyond all controversy, that by immediate act of God salvation might come, and had come, delivering the life from the gripping, enslaving, murderous power of sin.

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The year was drawing to its close. The little village had its share of Christmas festivities, and family reunions were taking place. There were men from the East, and men from the West, back in the old haunts for the holiday season. Wonderful stories of material success were told as "the boys" from the West expounded the opportunities of the prairie provinces. As is too often the case, the bar-room was the main social centre of week-day life in the village, and John Gage was always ready to fall into line when the prosperous ones gave the all-inclusive invitation, "Come on, boys." And so long as John helped to swell the receipts, his drunken presence was tolerated around the bar. Scores of times did he join in the greeting "A Merry Christmas," and the merrier it seemed to be to the frequenters of the Derby House bar, the sadder it really was to the homes from which they came.

Weeks of drinking, followed by the revelry of Christmas, brought John to such a condition that when the bar-room closed on Saturday night he was turned out of the house, and a little later dragged out of a corner of the drive-shed, and told to "get clean away" from the premises.

There was a strange look about the man on this particular Saturday night—a wild, almost savage appearance. He stood a moment on the sidewalk as if uncertain of his whereabouts, and then turned and walked in the direction of the Manse.

The minister answered the door-bell, and without a word John walked right in and through the hall to the study. At last he spoke. "You—told—me—to—come—any—time. I—want—to—stay—here—to-night." Then, with body bent, and as if in pain, with arms crossed, he rocked himself to and fro. "Oh, God! but I'm sick; three days nothing but whiskey: I've got it to-night for sure."

After much persuading the minister had the man in bed. The mistress of the Manse had prepared strong coffee as fast as her trembling body would let her. Once before she had passed through a night such as she feared this would be, and the prospect might well make her timorous. But the Manse and its furniture had three years ago been pledged to His service, and she murmured not.

The doctor had been sent for, but he was on a country call, and was not expected back until eleven.

At one end of the bedroom the minister sat watching John Gage. In some way the drink-inflamed man had placed under his pillow an old revolver and a short stiletto. After a time the hands clasped these with a vice-like grip. Suddenly standing out on the carpet he looked at the preacher, and said, "Why in the devil don't you go home? D'you want a fight? Say! I could rip you so's they'd have to pick you up in baskets."

A little later he imagined he was once more on the South African battle-field. With a sickening shudder he pointed to where his deluded eyes saw again the wounded and bleeding. "My God! see that poor devil with his leg nearly off! Look! ain't that awful. See that one squirming! —him yonder with his head half open!" Then straightening himself, he said, as if addressing some audience, "Friends, I say, and I know, *war is hell!*"

From time to time, under persuasion, he would return to his bed. Once he imagined he was driving down the old concession road near his grandfather's farm as in boyhood days. The sheets were jerked and handled as if reins. "Well, now, this *is* a slow horse. It will, ladies and gentlemen, be quite appropriate to sing 'we won't get home till morning.' I tell you what I'll do—I'll put the horse in the rig, and I'll get in the shafts, and then there'll be a horse in the buggy and an ass in the shafts, but we'll make better time." Then followed a weird burst of laughter.

The doctor arrived about midnight. For a couple of hours he watched the effect of his treatment, but rest would not come to the occupant of the guest-room. The eyes would appear to be closing in sleep, and then would suddenly open wide as if their owner were in terror of some impending disaster. Then the danger spot seemed to have been located, and with a series of jerks the head was raised higher and higher until John was sitting up in bed. Never once did the gaze leave the corner of the room. With the utmost stealth, first one foot and then the other was pushed from under the bedclothes to the floor. Very slowly and noiselessly, with knife still gripped, the demon-possessed man glided toward the corner. With great caution, as if measuring the distance, he bent the left knee, and at the same time lifted the right hand ready to strike. Then with blasphemous exclamations he stabbed the imaginary monstrosities. Again and again he seemed hurled back as by some real enemy in the fight. At last the knife went deep into the floor, and he seemed to have conquered. Never once taking his gaze from where the knife stood he backed slowly toward the bed. "Ah! I got him that time! See him! see him!" Then followed a blood-chilling burst of profanity at the wriggling object of his delirium. "But he can't get up! No! no! no! it's through his neck."

And so the long night wore on, and the wearied preacher, looking upon what drink could do with "God's Masterpiece," vowed anew to fight the cursed traffic in intoxicants as long as life lasted, and never knowingly to have his home defiled by such a life-blasting beverage.

It was nearly seven o'clock on Sabbath morning when John Gage fell asleep. At ten o'clock the bell of the adjoining church awakened him. The minister had anticipated the awakening, and was at the bedside. John seemed dazed for a time, but in a little while conversed with the one who had befriended him. He was urged to remain quietly in bed, and after a few words the minister clasped the hand of the outcast man, and kneeling at the bedside, laid the burden of his heart upon the One who is mighty to save. As the Amen was uttered Ruth approached the door. "All right, little one, come and see your friend John," were her father's words. Ruth was ready for church, and with garments and face alike attractive, laid her little hand in the big hand of the sin-wrecked man. Who can understand the power of the touch of a child's hand? Closing his fingers over the dainty, wee hand, John Gage turned his face to the wall and sobbed aloud. Little Ruth hardly knew what to do. Gently she placed the other hand on the dirty, unshaven cheek, and merely said sympathetically, "Don't cry."

John turned his head back again long enough to say brokenly, "God bless you, little gal."

Leading Ruth out of the room, the minister gathered up his books and went to the morning service. When he returned John Gage had departed. Early Monday morning Allan Short, a near-by farmer, called to tell him that John was out at his place cutting away at the winter's wood-pile. Allan promised to do what he could for John, but incidentally remarked that he did not see why a man couldn't "take a glass of beer without making a fool of himself."

A day or two later the minister drove by the Short homestead, presumably to make a call at the Meen's farm, where he had several faithful church-goers. As he passed, he recognized John at the saw-horse, and waved a greeting as to a friend.

On his return he drove up the road to the Short Farm, and John at once came forward, with the customary Canadian courtesy, to tie up or unhitch the horse, according to the visitor's wish. After a few pleasantries the minister went to the house and made a call on such members of the Short family as were home, and then returned to where his horse was tied. Hesitating a moment, he turned and walked to the wood-pile, and after complimenting John on his ability to swing the axe, spoke a few encouraging words. For a moment the hand rested on John's shoulder as he said, "You will be one of God's good men yet, John. I know it's a terrible fight, but God knows all about it, and with Him you can conquer. Come and see us any time you are in, but for the life of you don't loiter around the village, and do keep clear of the men who would be likely to make it easy for you to get what you know is ruinous to you. And don't forget we are your friends always, always."

As he turned the corner of the side road, he met Allan Short returning from a trip to the village. Referring to John Gage the farmer said, "He's been as straight as a British Columbia pine since he came out; but, say! it's kind o' pitiful, after all, the way he craves for whiskey. Me and the Missus watched him yesterday. She's been keeping her eyes open. Well, John was taking a breathing spell, after he had done a fine lot of splitting (and he's no greenhorn with the axe, let me tell you!), when all of a sudden he went to the fence-post where his coat was hanging, and putting it on as he walked, he made down the road. He got about ten rod and then stopped like as if he'd forgotten something, and then he started back, took off his coat, and pitched into that wood-pile as if it was sure death if he didn't get it finished by night. The missus says he's done the same thing three times to her knowledge, and once he went so far she was sure he was gone for good. But she says he sure did 'lambaste' them blocks when he got back."

The following Sunday morning little Ruth was missing from the Manse pew, and her absence from that service was so unusual as to cause many inquiries.

"Nothing serious," said the mother. "Just a little throat trouble, and as she seemed somewhat feverish we thought we had better leave her at home. Lizzie is taking care of her."

But on Monday morning the doctor looked very anxious after an examination of Ruth's throat, and in departing advised the minister to keep out of the child's room until an examination a few hours later.

On Tuesday morning it was a bit of village news that was passed from mouth to mouth, that the minister's little girl had diphtheria, and that the house was placarded. The occupants of the Manse were deeply touched during the following days by that spontaneous expression of practical sympathy that is characteristic of village life. But perhaps no one stirred the deepest emotions as did John Gage. Darkness had fallen over the village on Tuesday before he had heard of Ruth's sickness. There was some look of solicitation on Mrs. Short's face when John "guessed" he would stroll to the village.

He answered the look by saying almost curtly, "I'm going to the Manse."

The little patient's symptoms showed severe infection, and a second doctor was in consultation when the minister heard a very gentle rap on the door.

"Sorry I can't ask you in, John," he said, as he saw John standing on the verandah.

"How is she?" asked the caller, in a tone that revealed a great concern.

"She is a very sick little girl, John. Dr. Dodd is with Dr. Burnett just now. We can only give her the best care possible, and hope and pray. It is good of you to call, and when the wee girl is better she will be pleased to know you came. The poor little soul has been restless and feverish all the afternoon."

"Poor little gal! Tell her John hopes she'll soon be all right. I ain't much of a friend, God knows, but all the same I've been that lonesome like, since I heard she was sick, I don't feel as if I want to do anything, but just wait around. If there's any job I can do to help, I give you my word I'll be in trim to do it as long as the little gal needs me."

For two weeks John's "little gal" caused anxious days and nights—some of them days and nights when tearful prayers were sobbed out in the solitariness of study or bedroom—times when the physicians found no hopeful signs, and the little life seemed to be passing beyond human reach. It was on one such night that John brought a few delicacies from the farm for the minister's household, and waited for the report from the sick-room.

"The doctor has been with her an hour, John, and the wee girl is alive, and that's all we can say." The voice broke into a sob as the last words were spoken.

The two men stood in silent sympathy for a few minutes, and then John broke the silence. "She was friendly to me, sir, and I'll never forget it. Lots of folks what thinks they're big toads in the puddle treats me as if I was dirt, but the little gal is the biggest Christian of the lot, and she's done me more good than the whole gang of 'em. Say! the way she put her little hand on my face that Sunday morning was better'n any sermon I ever heard. Queer, ain't it, but it broke me all up." Then in response to a request from the minister John continued, "I'm afeared it wouldn't count much if I tried to pray, sir; but there ain't anything I wouldn't try my hand at for her."

The following day there was better news, and two days later the little sufferer was able to smile in response to the tokens of love that were showered upon her.

The physicians' faces relaxed, and they were delighted that professionally they were winning the battle, and the big-hearted senior physician rejoiced for other reasons. "By the way," he said that night in the Manse study, "I have met that fellow John Gage several times lately, and his interest in Ruthie is really remarkable. I didn't think it was in the man to care for anybody. And stranger still, he was sober each time. The little girl may yet be the salvation of the poor chap, and do what no one else has been able to do."

Shortly before St. Valentine's Day the Manse was thoroughly fumigated, and the placard removed. Ruth was amusing herself cutting out the kindergarten suggestions for Valentines, and sending them to selected friends. On a crudely shaped heart in poorly fashioned letters that she had learned to print, were the words, "Ruth loves John." On February the 14th, John Gage received the tiny envelope containing his Valentine. Nothing he had received in years pleased him quite so much.

"Now, ain't that great," he confided to Mrs. Short, " 'taint worth a cent, I suppose, but just this very minute they're ain't enough money in the whole village to buy it."

The quarterly communion service was about to be conducted in St. Andrew's Church. The usual invitations had been given from the pulpit, and a few had called at the Manse to discuss the question of membership. It was always a time of prayerful concern on the part of the minister lest any should take the step without realizing its obligations and privileges. At the minister's invitation, John Gage had spent over an hour in the study.

"Nothing less than an out and out surrender will do, John. You have had your way, and the devil has had his way, now you must be willing to let God have full control. There must be an entire breaking away from past associations, and you must take the step that can never mean retreat. Unless you do that the path back to the old ways will be too attractive, and too easy."

Once again the two men read passages from well-thumbed pages in the study Bible, and again the shepherd of souls called on the One Who is Mighty to Save, and then John prayed, and as the long silence was broken and a wanderer in a far country turned his face to his Father and uttered penitent words, the minister's tears of joy could no longer be restrained. As they rose from their knees, hands were clasped, and those feelings, too deep for words, found expression in the pressure of a protecting and trusting hand.

In the eyes of the majority of the Kirk Session, there was little risk in receiving into membership the well-to-do respectable sinner, but when the minister narrated the conversations he had had with John Gage, and suggested his name as a candidate for membership, eyebrows were raised and heads shook ominously.

"Wad it no' be better to put him off for a few months to see whether he could stan' alone first?" was the question of John McNair, the senior elder.

Colonel Monteith, who was greatly burdened with the responsibility for maintaining the dignity of the Presbyterian Church, wondered whether "this rather disreputable man Gage would not find more congenial associates down in the Free Methodist Hall." Tom Rollins didn't know "how *the people* would take it."

Murray Meiklejohn, characterized by his reticence and good common sense, moved that "John Gage be received," and stammeringly added that so far as leaving John to stand alone was concerned, he "guessed" they had been doing that ever since he came to town, ten years ago.

And so with some misgivings, and with some wounded pride, the Session included John Gage in its reception list.

On Friday night, an hour before the time for preparatory service, John called at the Manse.

"I'm a-trembling all through," he said to the minister, "and I was half-minded not to come. If it hadn't been for what you said about the hospital being a place for sick folks, I wouldn't had the courage to face it."

The preparatory service of that night is still spoken of in the quiet village. Perhaps the atmosphere was created by one who had prayed much that day that the congregation might receive a new vision of the Redeemer, through the words of one for whom not an individual in the entire congregation had any hope six weeks before.

The sermon over, the minister and elders extended the right hand of fellowship to the little company occupying the front seats. "To-night," said the minister, as he returned to the platform, "I have asked my friend Mr. John Gage to say a few words." The lecture-hall had probably never known stiller moments than those immediately following the announcement.

John Gage, pale and trembling, not daring to look at his audience, stood facing the platform. In a low voice he said, "Well, friends, I have been a bad man—that's no news to anybody, but God helping me I'm going to be better. Seems like a miracle, don't it, that John Gage has been sober for five weeks?"

As he sat down, the "Let us pray" of the minister preceded a petition for "our brother," that made most hearts tender and prayerful.

"It's a new day for St. Andrew's," said Murray Meiklejohn, as he shook the hand of the minister after the benediction. "Nothing like to-night's meeting in my memory. Looks as if we were going to stop singing 'Rescue the Perishing' and get on the job."

It is no easy task for the average Presbyterian elder to utter a fervent "God bless you," but that night hearts were stirred and tongues were loosened, and John Gage felt that after all the world was not so unfriendly as he had imagined. Hand after hand was extended in genuine welcome. But the finest thing of all, as the minister said a little later, was the way the Colonel warmed up to John. He had never been seen to manifest the same cordiality in the Church before. "A manly step to take, sir—a manly step—needs courage to fight that kind of a battle. Personally I am glad to welcome you to St. Andrew's."

When story-time came at the Manse on the following evening, Ruth was all attention as her mother told of the home-coming of another prodigal, and of all it might mean.

Ruth's prayer had two additional words that night. The closing part was uttered more deliberately than usual, as if in anticipation of the seriousness of the added petition. "Bless daddy and mamma, and—all—the—friends—I—love —*and John*, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

John Gage secured temporary work in the village delivering freight for a local carter. Whenever opportunity afforded, the *habitués* of the bar-rooms did not spare him their sneers and jeers. "Folks say you're a hell of a good preacher, John." "When are you going to wear the starched dog-collar, John?" Calling him to a little group on the sidewalk, one of his former chums said, with mock solemnity, "Let us pray." A roar of laughter followed, as John, crimson-faced, walked away.

There were days when the sting in some of the taunts was hard to bear—days when only One knows the conflict in that will that had become enfeebled by sin. But John Gage was steadily gaining the victory, and the visits to the Manse and the new friends around the church were displacing the former associations.

Signs of a material prosperity that John had never before known were gradually appearing. The village tailor took particular pride one morning in showing the minister a piece of blue serge, "as fine a bit of goods as is imported. I'm cutting a suit out of it for John Gage, and it will be as good as I can make it. Did you ever think how much the tailor can co-operate with God in fixing a man up?"

But not all the villagers were desirous of cooperating with God in the reformation of John Gage. A little crowd had gathered one night in McKee's barber shop, and the minister of St. Andrew's was being harshly criticized for his frequent attacks on the liquor traffic. The proprietor of the poolroom, who attended St. Andrew's at the time of the Lodge annual parade, announced his intention of absenting himself unless the minister "minded his own business." Others made similar threats, which in the aggregate might bring the minister to the proper frame of mind which became one who "received his bread and butter from some of the very people he had been abusing."

Then the case of John Gage was discussed, and uncomplimentary terms were freely applied. McKee thought "it would be a d——d good joke on the Presbyterian preacher if John could be made as full as a goat, and then sent to the Manse." To the lasting disgrace of the barber, he attempted to perpetrate the "joke."

Bud Jenks was a willing tool of anybody who would reward him with a whiskey, and when McKee offered him all he could take at one standing if he got Gage to take a drink, he was ready at least to make the attempt. And so on a day when John had shovelled coal from car to waggon and waggon to cellar for eight hours, and was warm, tired and thirsty, Bud appeared with a little pail, as if coming from the town pump. John was at the grating tramping the coal further into the cellar, and his head was about on a level with the sidewalk. "Good-day, Bud," he called up as Bud stood for a moment.

"Good-day, John; warm job, eh?"

"You bet it's warm," was the reply, as the coal-begrimed brow was wiped.

"Take a drink o' water?" asked Bud.

"Sure I will, and thank you," answered the thirsty toiler with hand extended to the pail, which was placed on the sidewalk. Quickly Bud removed the lid, and gave the pail a tilt as the rim came near John's face. Just a touch of froth from the lager beer was carried to John's lips, but instantly he pushed back the pail with an exclamation almost of pain. At the same moment he slid further into the cellar, and kneeling on the coal, with hands clasped against the wall, cried out again and again, "Oh, my God, help me, help me, help me!"

Bud peered into the darkness and called several times to John. At last John approached the grating again. "Bud," he said quietly, "for God's sake go away and leave me alone; I'd rather drop dead than put another drop of that to my lips."

Bud did not immediately depart, despite the pleading of the man in the cellar, and not until a passer-by had entered into conversation with him, and the two had moved off together, did John pull himself to the sidewalk and drive away. "Oh, the smell of it near drove me mad for a few minutes," he said, as he confided the occurrence to his friends at the Manse. "If it wasn't for the little gal, and coming up here, I'd get far enough away from this place, so's I wouldn't have the same temptations."

"Temptation is not a matter of locality, John, and you would not escape it by crossing a continent, and besides, we need you right here. If you win out and give God the glory, you will do more to prove His power than a year of sermons could."

"Bully for Colonel Monteith! He's a brick, by jinks he is!" The words were uttered in an excited voice by the young minister on his return from one of his daily trips to the Post Office.

"Why, daddy," exclaimed the wife, "I'll report you to the Session for using bad language. But what has happened anyway?"

It was several minutes before the cause of the "bad language" could be satisfactorily narrated. The conversation in McKee's barber shop was related, and the indignation of the mistress of the Manse was all that could be desired.

"Well," continued the minister, "somebody who heard it happened casually to tell Colonel Monteith. Within half an hour, the Colonel was in the shop. McKee was lathering Lawyer Taskey, but that didn't seem an important matter to the Colonel, for without waiting until he was through he at once faced him with what he had heard, and asked if it was true. At first McKee tried to evade the question, but the Colonel pressed for an answer. 'Well, suppose I did. Is it any of your ——— business?' replied McKee. Then with a sneer he added, 'And anyhow, I didn't know that you and *Mister* John Gage were such bosom friends.' 'Look here, McKee,' and the voice of the Colonel trembled with emotion, 'I hold no brief for this man Gage any more than I do for any other man in the village, but when a fellow puts up a fight like he has for the last two months—a fellow, as you know very well, with veins full of bad blood—it is in the highest degree reprehensible for any man to be even a party to such a devilish scheme as you tried to work out by making a poor sot like Bud Jenks your catspaw. And nobody, sir—I say, sir, nobody but a contemptible cur would attempt such a dastardly act.' And then the barber got impudent and told the dignified elder to go on a long trip. Moving nearer to him the Colonel said, 'Before I go there, McKee, there's a place I wish to accompany you,' and quick as a flash he grabbed McKee and tried to drag him to the back of the shop. McKee didn't know what was going to happen, and naturally objected some, but Jim Morton, who saw it, says the Colonel was 'mad from the toes up,' and after laming a few chairs, and damaging a mirror in the scuffle, he got the rear door open and pulled McKee after him down the bank to the creek. The barber likely surmised what was the next item on the programme, and not caring for cold baths in March, he did some furious scuffling, but though the Colonel's hat and a few buttons had disappeared, he was able to report progress. Jim says the language of McKee as he got near the water has never been surpassed in Elmsdale. Lawyer Taskey felt like going to McKee's rescue, as he doubtless earnestly desired to have his shave finished, but when he got his hat on and started down the bank the Colonel thundered something at him that caused him to decide it would be pleasanter to remain in the shop.

"Unfortunately the Colonel could not part company with McKee at the critical moment, and the two of them fell into the water together. The Colonel stood the shock well enough to have sufficient presence of mind to immediately grab the barber and duck him thoroughly, and then the two of them scrambled out, and the air is still blue around McKee's place; but taking a conjunct view of the entire affair, the Colonel appeared satisfied.

"Jim says that the Colonel's language was not what would be expected from an elder, and that when there was the final scuffle at the edge of the creek, he heard him call McKee 'a blawsted skunk.' I suppose that's terrible in a member of St. Andrew's Session, but I'm sinner enough to be glad that McKee got a small percentage of his desserts, and my backbone feels stiffer and I shall carry my head a little higher because Colonel Monteith's on my Session."

The minister jumped to his feet, and swinging his arm in a circle above his head shouted, "Bully for Colonel Monteith, the man who turned McKee's 'joke' into a boomerang."

The eyes of the minister's wife had sparkled with interest as she listened to what had happened to McKee, and the minister was satisfied when at the conclusion of the incident she said quietly, "I am so sorry Colonel Monteith fell in the creek. Ask him up for dinner to-morrow, or some day soon. I'll do my very best to show my appreciation of his well-meaning defence of our John."

Some weeks later John procured a position in a distant city. Ruth and her father went to the station to bid him farewell, the latter assuring him of the unfailing interest of his friends at the

Manse, and uttering a few words of counsel, now that distance would prevent the frequent visits of the past.

For a while all went well, and encouraging reports reached the village Manse. Sometimes the letter was addressed to the Minister, but oftener to Ruth, and all of them revealed the strong hold the little one had upon the reforming man.

Then came word of dull times and scarcity of work and loneliness. It was after a letter that revealed unusual despondency, that an urgent invitation was sent for John to return to the village and spend a few weeks at the Manse until labour conditions improved.

No answer came to this invitation, but two weeks later a letter came from John's boarding-house, which read as follows:—

"Dear Sir:—I take the liberty of writing you, because there is a Mr. Gage boarding at my place, and he is real sick and don't seem to have no friends near here, and I can't take care of him no longer. He says you are his best friend, and so I thought you would tell me what to do, as he hasn't got no money, and I am a hard-working woman and can't afford to do without it. He ought to go to the Hospital, I guess, but he don't take to the notion. Please do something right away.—Mrs. John McCaul, 14, St. Lawrence Lane."

The following morning the minister started for the city, and late that afternoon stood at the door of No. 14, St. Lawrence Lane. The lane consisted of a long, monotonous row of dingy little houses on the one side, and a miscellaneous group of stables and sheds on the other. Factory buildings, with their "insolent towers that sprawl to the sky," overtowered the whole, shutting out much light, and pouring forth from their immense chimneys the smoke that usually hung like a pall over the narrow lane.

Mrs. McCaul was greatly relieved by the presence of the minister, and as they sat in the ventilation-proof parlour she told him of John's hard luck, interspersing most of her family history into the narration. "He's terrible discouraged," she added, "and the doctor says he'd oughter be in some more cheerfuller place, although I'm doing the best I can."

It was a poorly furnished dark bedroom into which the minister was ushered, and the surroundings of the whole place reminded him of a popular description of certain American city boarding-houses, which are said to "furnish all the facilities for dying."

John clasped the extended hand with gratitude, and the visitor's presence did much that medicine had failed to do. As he stood talking to the sick man, his eyes rested a moment on a little red Valentine that had been inserted between the glass and the frame of the tinselled mirror.

"I see you're looking at me Valentine," said John.

"Yes! I did notice it."

"Well, sir, many a day the last few weeks I've wondered whether I could hold out. When a fellow ain't got a job, and money and friends is scarce, it seems like it's easier for the devil to get th' inside track. There was some days when it seemed as if all the devils in hell was after me a-trying to get me back to the old life, and I used to come up here and look at me Valentine. I've stood before that there glass a good many times lately, and looked at the red heart what Ruthie cut out, and said, 'God help me to be faithful to the little gal.' "

After a good deal of persuasion John consented to go to the hospital, so that he might receive proper care.

For seven weeks the disease, which was a part of "the wages of sin," held sway. Once John thought the end was near, and that probably, ere many days, he must pass away. He expressed his fears in a broken voice to the nurse, and then asked for the Valentine. Tears filled his eyes as he gazed at the trifling token of a child's love. With an effort he controlled his voice and said huskily: "If anything happens, nurse, I want to have that Valentine with me. You know what I mean, don't you?"

The nurse nodded her head.

"You see, nurse, it was sent me by a little gal—the minister's little gal. I was pretty far gone a year ago, and if ever God sent an angel into this world to help lift up a poor wretch of a man, it was when that little gal started to be my friend. And when them little hands cut out the heart for my Valentine and sent it to me, and I read 'Ruth loves John,' I felt as good as if I'd been sent a fortune."

The news of John's sickness had its effect on Ruth's nightly prayer: "Please, God, make John better, because he's very sick. For Jesus' sake. Amen."

John's sickness was not unto death. Slowly he regained health and courage, and as soon as he was able to work he secured a position in a city factory. Much of his leisure is being given to City Mission Work.

He has often been seen on a street corner joining in an open-air service. Not long ago he was telling a crowd of men what the Gospel had done for him. "Say, fellows, when I think of it—

think of what I was—I just know He's able for anything. I'm ashamed of myself, but I'm proud of Him."

As he finished his testimony a workman in the same factory, who was standing at the rear of the crowd, called out, "Yes, and John's the decentest feller in the factory, so he is."

The red heart has faded almost to a brown. It no longer occupies its place on the mirror. A stranger picking up John Gage's Bible might wonder why a soiled and worn bit of paper in the shape of a heart should be pasted on the front inside page; but often a tired workman, reading his "verses" for the night, turns first of all to the front inside page, and reads three words that light and time and dirt have almost effaced—"Ruth loves John."

Sometimes the gaze is long, and sometimes the fading words are still further dimmed by tears, but the faded Valentine is fragrant with precious memories of a child's love that resulted in the home-coming of the prodigal.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CORD OF LOVE

A TRANSCONTINENTAL express was speeding across the prairies to its Pacific Coast terminus. Two hours before it shrieked its approach to a foothill city, the local police received a message which, being interpreted, read: "Detain Lavina Berson, travelling on No. 96; age about fifteen, black hair, very attractive. Travelling in company of two men when train left B——."

When No. 96 pulled into the depôt, two plain-clothes officers boarded the train and soon located the girl wanted. At first the flashing black eyes looked defiantly into the face of Staff-Inspector Kenney as he requested her to accompany him. But the law must be obeyed, and on being shown a detective's badge the little runaway passed with her escort comparatively unnoticed into the city street.

At the police-station she sat in the anteroom with the matron, while the inspector, the staff-inspector and the plain-clothes detective discussed the case. The girl's youthfulness and attractiveness appealed to their sympathies.

"It's too blamed bad to send a pretty youngster like that to the cells," said one.

"Why not send her to that new Rescue Home till we get more particulars? They'll take care of her. There's a woman there that knows her job all right."

And so to the Redemptive Home Lavina was sent, the authorities giving the usual instructions governing such a case. For a few hours the newcomer was silent, but few girls could long be silent in the presence of the big-hearted, winsome Superintendent of that Home. It was a new experience for Lavina; the only kindness she had known was the traitorous type, and it was hard for her to believe that there was such a thing as unselfish love. Forty-eight hours from the time she crossed the threshold of the Home, the hand that was almost ready to strike any one who seemed to have co-operated in checking her reckless career was slipped along the forearm of the Superintendent.

"Everybody thinks I'm bad, and I guess I am, but I believe if I had lived with *you* I might have wanted to be good."

The words did not come easily, but when the Superintendent stroked the black hair and put an arm around the wanderer, drawing the head to her shoulder, she realized that love had won its first battle in that misguided life.

The following morning a young man rang the door-bell of the Home in an impatient manner. When the Superintendent appeared he said, "Is this where Lavina Berson is?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Well, I want her, and I want her d——d quick. She's a d——d nuisance. She's never been any good. Nobody can do anything with her." Then, drawing a rope from his pocket, he said, "I'll bind the little devil with this, and if that won't do I've something else in here (putting his hand over his hip-pocket) that will settle her." His face was red with passion, and his eyes flashed with anger. "Oh! you needn't tell me," he continued. "I know all about her; I'm her brother. I'm sick of getting her out of difficulties. I say she's a d——d nuisance, and I ain't going to let her forget this trip I've had to take, not on your bottom dollar I ain't. I've got something else to do than to be chasing over the country after her."

"You cannot get possession of your sister to-day," answered the Superintendent. "Even if I were not under obligation to the authorities to detain her, pending their instructions, I could not let her go with you just now. She is a friend of mine, and I love her. She has told me her story; she is only just sixteen. Ropes and pistols and policemen are not the remedy, sir; she needs a brother—a real brother. If you call in the morning I shall be glad to have a quiet talk with you."

Ten days later, in her own town, the courtroom was crowded when the case of Lavina Berson was called. The trial resulted in a mass of evidence to show that she was bad. There seemed no other course open to the Judge but to send her to a reformatory. She had associated with the fastest boys and girls, and with the most lawless men and women her town had known. The policeman, giving evidence, made it clear that the town would be well rid of her. Not one witness, even to the girl's mother, had any hopeful word to speak.

In the face of such evidence there seemed only one course open. When the word "reformatory" reached the girl's ear she broke into a passion of weeping, so that the Judge hesitated a moment. Then there was some movement and whispering near the witness-box. The Superintendent mentioned had journeyed Eastward to be present at the trial, and she was now conferring with the Morality Inspector.

The weeping girl looked appealingly through her tears at the one who had befriended her. "Oh, please," she whispered, in a voice broken with sobs, "don't let them send me to that awful place. It'll only make me worse; take me with you. I'll do anything you tell me; please, oh! please, Miss Moffatt."

Turning to the Judge the Superintendent said, "Your Honour, I am a stranger to you, but as a representative of the Women's council of the —— Church in Canada may I say a few words?" The Judge nodded assent, and with a heart full of love for the wayward, Miss Moffatt made one of the most impassioned appeals conceivable. In closing, she said, "I ask your Honour to give this girl into my charge for one year. In view of the evidence given, may I be allowed to say that she has been brutally sinned against. No man who has spoken has referred to her partners in sin, nor has any man suggested that the stronger sex has any responsibility to be a brother and protector of girls. The evidence reveals the fact that plenty of men co-operated in her downfall; apparently not one made any effort to uplift. Some of her betrayers are still counted as respectable men, while she receives all the blame and the shame. One remedy does not seem to have been tried, and in the name of the One who long ago said, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more,' I ask you to be gracious enough to allow me to try a corrective which I believe will be more effective than what has been suggested."

The Judge caught the light in those eyes, and with manifest emotion addressed the accused:

"Lavina, you have found a friend; so long as you are true to her you will not again be called to appear before this Court. May Heaven's blessing rest upon such women as the one who has spoken in your behalf! The case is dismissed."

Once again Lavina journeyed Westward. Once again she was on No. 96, but no longer with betrayers. By her side was the Superintendent with her sweet, sheltering influence.

And so life began again for Lavina in the Redemptive Home. In view of her past life, it was worth crossing a continent to see the gladness in her eyes when one day Miss Moffatt put her hand upon her shoulder and said playfully, "Lavina is my right-hand girl; I think she'll soon be Assistant Superintendent."

As one of the workers was passing along the hallway upstairs some months later she was arrested by the sound of a pleading voice—some one was offering a prayer. Noiselessly she drew near the room from which the voice came. The last petition was being uttered, "O God, please help the other girls to be good like You helped me, for Jesus' sake. Amen." The little dark-eyed girl was kneeling by the bedside with her arm around the shoulder of a young Hungarian maiden who had been rescued from a life of shame. It developed later that these two rescued ones were daily praying for others who were being sheltered in the Home.

How it all reminds one of that far-away scene! "No man could bind him; no, not with chains; because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. . . . Jesus said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit." And the modern evil spirit and its rebuke is like unto that. "Nobody can do anything with her; I've got this rope to bind the little devil with." And then this: "O God, please help the other girls to be good like You helped me, for Jesus' sake. Amen." On the heels of the failure of all others Jesus comes and reveals Himself to-day as of old, as the master of demons.

What the future days hold for Lavina Berson we know not, but the height of her ambition to-day is that she be accepted for training, so that some day she may work among those of the class to which she once belonged.

CHAPTER XIV

NELL'S HOME-GOING

St. Andrew's Church was losing its respectability. It was one of the oldest in the Province, and the town in which it was situated had for some years prided itself in being a "Society" town. The select few who had for so long been undisturbed by the "common" people were having to endure the presence, in near-by pews, of some who had no entrance into the best social circles—and the shocking part of it was that the new minister, who was reported to have come from one of the best families in Montreal, rather gloried in this condition of affairs.

Two families had already withdrawn from the membership of St. Andrews—two of the wealthiest and gayest—and that within six months of the minister's induction. The withdrawal of the Farsees and Shunums happened in this wise. A few Sabbath evenings previous to the "interview" that Mrs. Farsee had had with the minister, a young woman of unsavory reputation had dared to enter St. Andrew's. Perhaps the minister was not aware of what he did, but there was no denying the fact that he shook hands with the said young woman, and hoped she would "always feel welcome at St. Andrew's." After seeing, with her own eyes, a second and a third visit, and a second and a third welcome, Mrs. Farsee, with the moral backing of Mrs. Shunum, had her now much-talked-of interview with the Rev. Thomas Fearnon.

"Mr. Fearnon," she commenced in an agitated tone, "there is a matter that so greatly affects our church, that although it is rather a delicate subject, I felt I must be frank enough to speak with you about it. Do you know—but of course you don't know—the character of the young woman who has been sitting in Mrs. Greatheart's seat for the past three Sunday evenings, and to whom you have given three distinct welcomes to St. Andrew's?"

"Yes," was the reply, "I think I know something of her character and past, and it is very sad."

"But, Mr. Fearnon," exclaimed Mrs. Farsee, "you surely cannot sanction her attendance at *our* church! What *will* people say?"

"Mrs. Farsee," was the quiet rejoinder, "I wonder what my Master would say if I did not sanction the presence of any for whom He died. For whom are our services, if not for the sinful?"

"Yes, but, Mr. Fearnon, that kind of person should go to some other place—for instance, there's the Salvation Army."

"Thank God there is the Salvation Army, but so long as Thomas Fearnon is pastor of this church, yonder doors shall never be too narrow to admit the sin-burdened." Thomas Fearnon's voice thrilled with emotion as he uttered these words.

"Well, I suppose it's no use saying anything more," said Mrs. Farsee with an injured air, "but it's hard to hear people sneer at one's church, and twice lately I've heard people—and prominent society people too—say that our church was getting to be a 'House of Refuge,' and I tell you that kind of thing goes hard with people who have taken the pride we have in St. Andrew's Church."

"To me," said Mr. Fearnon, "that report is encouraging, and I covet that intended sneer as a permanent tribute to any church of which I may be pastor—a House of Refuge is what I want St. Andrew's to be. Surely the young woman you have named needs a place of refuge?"

"Then I understand you will still allow her to attend our church, despite the wishes of two of the most loyal and best-giving families you have, Mr. Fearnon?" Mrs. Farsee placed an unmistakable emphasis on "best giving."

"Your understanding is quite correct, Mrs.

Farsee, and if ever St. Andrew's Church closes its doors on any man or woman, in like circumstances to the one you refer to, I care not how sinworn and wretched, it closes them at the same time on Thomas Fearnon—we go out together."

"If that is your decision," replied Mrs. Farsee haughtily, "please remove the names of Mr. and Mrs. M. T. Farsee and Miss Lucy Farsee from the membership roll, and I am also authorized by Mrs. Shunum to tell you that all the Shunums withdraw from the church for the same reason."

Thomas Fearnon retired that night sad at heart—not that the loss of these two families from the membership roll gave him much concern, for to tell the truth he was more concerned to know how they ever came to be put on the roll, but he was concerned to find that kind of spirit among the membership of the congregation to which he had come with such high hopes, fresh from college. So far as losing members was concerned, he reminded himself that, in God's arithmetic, subtraction often produced an increase. Perhaps of his congregation the words of Scripture were true, "The people are yet too many." Nevertheless, the offended families needed His Saviour and the ministry of the church as much as, perhaps more than, the poor creature whose very presence they thought defiled their heretofore select congregation.

The following Sabbath morning the text was Luke xix: 10, "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Those who had attended Mrs. Farsee's "afternoon bridge" on the preceding Thursday knew that the sermon was the outgrowth of the "interview." None of them used their favourite adjective "lovely" of Thomas Fearnon's sermon that morning; the mission of the Master and the consequent mission of His church was presented with a clearness and an earnestness that made not a few decidedly uncomfortable."

"I charge you, my fellow workers," he pleaded, "never to degenerate into dilettante church parlour triflers, but strike out for God in hard work to recover the lost. There are those whose life's roses are turned to ashes, those who have almost forgotten how to smile, those from whose hearts all music has fled. What an incomparable joy to tell them of, and seek to lead them to, the One who with divine delicacy said, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.' That welcoming Saviour would speak through us to those whom too often we, professedly His followers, would cast out. If every individual in this world treated the fallen as you do, my friend, would it be easy or hard for that one to get into the Kingdom of God? Where shall the wanderers be welcome if not in the Father's House? Where shall those whom He created and for whom He died find friendship and help, if not in that company of worshippers who cry 'Our Father'?"

To not a few the message of that morning seemed intensely personal. In that inner judgment hall, where the prisoner and the judge are one, some verdicts were arrived at, and the verdicts were "guilty."

"If every individual in this world treated the fallen as you do, would it be easy or hard for that one to get into the Kingdom of God?"

Thomas Fearnon had asked that question with an intensity of feeling that revealed itself in the whispered words, and that produced a profound silence throughout the sanctuary. And it was not in vain that he had put his best into prayer and preparation for that morning's message. At least one in the congregation asked to be forgiven for passing by, like priest and Levite, needy ones to whom there should and could have been a ministry of mercy.

Jessie Buchanan saw the "vision splendid" that morning, and no longer could she be satisfied with her life of elegant ease. From that very hour her life and all the trappings of life were promised fully to her rightful Lord—no longer would she hope to have Him as *Saviour* but reject Him as *Lord*.

* * * * *

A peaceful Sabbath day's services had closed, and in the quiet of her beautiful and cosy little "den" Jessie Buchanan sat talking to a friend before the flickering embers in the fireplace. Three months had passed away since Thomas Fearnon's sermon on Luke xix:10, three months of sometimes perplexing but always joyous service to Jessie Buchanan. Already several lives had been gladdened and helped by the radiating influence of her consecrated life.

The Buchanan home on the hillcrest had gladly opened its doors during these three months to some who had never expected to cross its threshold. And so to-night, for the third time, the young woman who had unknowingly caused the departure of two families from St. Andrew's Church, sat in the fire-light with her new-found friend.

Wisely and unostentatiously Jessie Buchanan had made her acquaintance, and their meetings had been invariably away from the public eye. But into the broken life was coming the conquering power of an unselfish love. To-night, as the flames diminished, the young woman unfolded a little of her life.

"Please don't hate me for it—I had to tell some one. Oh! if only some one like you had helped me when I first went to the city; but it was my own fault. Still, if you do wrong there seems so many more to help you to keep on in the same way than there are to help you back."

For some minutes she talked on, and then Jessie Buchanan moved her chair a little closer and laid a hand sympathetically upon the girl's shoulder.

"You think my name is Flossie, don't you, Miss Buchanan?" the girl asked slowly. "Well, it isn't. Nobody here knows either of my right names, but I'm going to tell you: my right name is Nellie Gillard; and Miss Buchanan, I want to be good again, and maybe get back home soon—only, I'm afraid, for I haven't even written for nearly a year." Tears were wiped away as the memory of the old home was revived in the light of new desires.

* * * * *

Another week was nearing its close, and Jessie Buchanan was as usual making her plans for a hospitable Sunday. Glancing down the driveway, she was surprised to see Nellie Gillard approaching the house. This was the first daylight visit Nellie had made, and Saturday morning was so unusual a time that Jessie Buchanan was at the door before the bell-handle could be pulled. A cordial greeting and Nellie was accompanied to the now familiar den. As the door closed the visitor at once made known the purpose of her visit. "Miss Buchanan, I'd like to go home, but I cannot—I dare not go alone."

"Oh! I'm so glad you have decided. How soon do you wish to go, dear?" Jessie Buchanan's voice and face revealed her joy and thankfulness.

"I'd like to go right away," was the reply.

Within a few hours Nellie and her new-found friend were on their way to the railway station.

The "local" was nearly three hours late when almost at midnight it pulled into a little flag station in North-Western Ontario. It was over two miles to the Gillards' home, and Jessie Buchanan suggested the desirability of getting the station agent to assist them in procuring a vehicle and driver.

The night was clear and bright, and Nellie urged that if it was not too tiring for her companion she would much rather walk. "I know every step of the way, and—and—well you are the only one I want with me just now."

In the moonlight of that early October night two young women might have been seen walking along the fifth concession.

At a turn of the road Nellie pointed to a little building: "There is the schoolhouse I attended." When a church spire stood out clear against the sky, there was a sob in the voice, "I used to teach in that Sunday School and sing in the choir."

The gate of the old homestead was reached at last. The wanderer's hand clung for a moment to the top rail and the head rested on her forearm.

"I wonder—I wonder if Father will let me in; I don't deserve it, but I believe he will." And she was not mistaken.

At the side of the old roughcast dwelling, two bedroom windows had been raised a few inches. Beneath these the only daughter of the home called out in a trembling voice, "Father." There was no response. Could anything have happened? A second time on the silent night the voice anxiously uttered the same word. Immediately thereafter they heard a movement and a man's head appeared at the window. "Father! it's Nell: I want to be your Nell again. Will you let me come home?"

"Let you come home? You bet I will, Nell—you bet I will." The last words were re-uttered after the head had disappeared.

The only other words they heard were, "Ma! Ma!" uttered in a voice trembling with joy.

No pen can adequately describe that home-coming. Jessie Buchanan was forgotten for the moment, but as she saw the daughter's head resting first on father's and then on mother's shoulder, and heard the old man say again and again, "My Nell! oh! my Nell," her cup of joy was full.

It was not what one could call a praying home, but on that early Sabbath morning four people knelt in the little sitting-room, and Jessie Buchanan's first audible prayer was offered in thanksgiving for the home-coming of the wanderer. And to-day, in the little church in the grove, one of the regular worshippers is Nellie Gillard.

CHAPTER XV

THE HERMIT

THE missionary had received instructions from the Superintendent to go into a remote and sparsely populated District in the Green River Country.

The settlement to which he was to minister lay forty miles from the railway station. "You will just have to make the best arrangements you can for getting from the station to your field," was all the direction he received as to how to cover the last forty of the almost two thousand miles of his journey.

At the general store and postoffice—a short distance from Heathcote flag-station, he made inquiries about getting out to Cameron's Plain. The information from the store-keeper was not encouraging. "Ain't been nobody from that way for quite a spell, stranger. Roads is somethin' fierce, and the river is on the rampage just now, and it takes a mighty good hoss to make it."

"How's chances for getting to the Plain, Dan?" he called to a man sitting on a nail keg. Dan disposed of a mouthful of tobacco juice, and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. " 'Taint likely too bad as far as the Split Rock, but by gosh! ye'd have some picnic to make the Crossing."

The missionary was anxious to get to his new charge as soon as possible, and when he discovered that Dan had been frequently over the road, he turned to him for advice as to the best way of making the trip. Dan thought the Crossing might be made on horseback, although the water would be "darned cold" and a man might have to do some swimming himself before he'd make the other side.

"I've never ridden horseback," said the missionary hesitatingly, "and I have a good deal of baggage that I shall need right away, for I am going to 'bach.' "

Dan's curiosity was aroused—for visitors were few and far between at Heathcote, and still fewer at Cameron's Plain. While matters were being more fully explained he eyed the stranger critically, and kept his jaws steadily working on his chewing tobacco. "O-o-o-oh!" he drawled, "So you're the guy that's going to spout in the Plain every Sunday! I mind Billy Merrill sayin' they was going to have a parson in the Spring. Can't you stay here a spell 'till the roads dry up a bit? If you'd ever seen the place you're a-goin' to, you wouldn't be in such a gol-darn hurry to get there. 'Taint no place for a Christian to live in. Still if you're set on making the trip, and willin' to risk your neck and can put up the dough, I guess Jimmie Stevenson'll haul you thar. He's got a pair of bronchos that'll pull his old buckboard through fire and brimstone."

Jimmie was located at the blacksmith shop, and was willing to make the trip for fifteen dollars "seein' as how it was for the sky pilot." "You can stay at our place to-night, and we'll get an early start in the mornin'." Jimmie's abode consisted of two rooms and the missionary had the edge of a home-made bed which also accommodated Jimmie and three children.

In the morning the household was astir early. The visitor glanced around in search of a wash-dish. One of his young bedfellows answered his inquiries by conducting him to a hollowed log at the rear of the house. The water in it looked as though it had done service for many days. After the wooden plug was drawn out however and the primitive receptacle cleansed as far as possible, the missionary refilled it and had his morning wash. The boy watched the process with a curiously interested gaze. The use of a pocket-comb and mirror was to him a source of surprise and amusement. When the missionary's clean-up had ended the lad gave expression to his pent-up feelings by a series of questions.

"Say, mister, how often do you wash like that?"

"Every morning," was the amused reply.

"Every morning—like THAT; every morning?" The affirmative answer only increased the lad's wonder. After a moment's silence he continued, "Say, mister, do you use SOAP every morning?"

"Yes."

"Well, say, mister, how often do you pull that thing all over your hair?"

"I comb my hair three or four times each day, I guess," was the reply.

This seemed almost incredible to the lad.

"You wash like that *every*, *every* morning? An' you comb your hair four times every day?"

There was a long pause, and then the boy added in a sympathetic tone:

"Say, mister, yous must be a pile of trouble to yerself."

An hour later, the roping of the trunk to the buckboard was completed, and with his wiry little team of bronchos, Jimmie and the preacher started on their long drive.

It did not take the preacher long to appreciate the store-keeper's words that the roads were "fierce." Never in his life had he been so jarred and jerked and tumbled. He tried to keep steady by clutching the back and front of the seat, but again and again he was pitched well on to Jimmie's knee and then back with a painful bump against the low iron rail. Several times he came dangerously near to landing head-first between the bronchos. The whole outfit, including men and trunk, was a mass of mud. That which had not been plastered by what the wheels threw up was splashed by the plunging bronchos. Both men were constantly wiping away the mud from their faces. Here and there where wayward streams from melting snows had made deep ditches in the road, branches or logs had been drawn in as a makeshift bridge, otherwise such washouts would have been impassable.

About noon refreshment for men and beasts was procured at a wayside shack. The occupant was asked as to the condition of the road up to the Crossing. He gave the disquieting information that for the next five miles there was "no bottom to it." For most of the way the best Jimmie could do with Magpie and Buster was to keep them at a walk. Gladly would he have given them an occasional rest but he knew they must be kept going, for to stop would mean a settling into mud from which they would be unable to extricate themselves. At last they neared the Crossing. At most seasons of the year it was the place at which the Green River could be crossed without difficulty and in the Summer with the aid of a few stepping-stones one could easily make it on foot.

The road led straight to the bank of the river at a point where there was a sharp curve directly to the East for the gradual descent to the river-bed. As soon as Jimmie was near enough to see the height of the water he shook his head dubiously and merely said: "By gum, I don't know."

Standing up he drove very carefully as he neared the bank into which the current made inroads each spring. The bronchos appeared to share Jimmie's anxiety for they picked their way with unusual caution.

Jimmie had just decided to investigate on foot before driving any further when one of his horses stumbled and dropped. Instantly he knew there had happened what he had feared—the rushing river had again undermined the roadway at this particular bend. A few seconds later the ground gave way all around them and the team, buckboard and men dropped three or four feet with mud and soil dripping and falling on all sides. Neither man was able to retain his seat and when they struggled to their feet they would have been unrecognizable by their best friends.

The bronchos plunged desperately and as they crowded each other the tongue of the buckboard got across the back of one of them and broke off near the doubletree. For a moment or two the mud-covered men could do little more than cling to the buckboard which was fast settling deeper into the mire.

Jimmie knew that things would become still more serious unless something was quickly done. With much effort the traces were unfastened and the neck-yoke released. In vigorous language he yelled at his half buried team. As they tried to respond he pulled sharply on the lines in an endeavour to turn them in the direction from which they had come, for to have gone ahead would have taken them into the river at a point where the water was too deep for safety.

It was difficult and dangerous work, and for a time it looked as if both men and horses would never get out of the little lake of mud into which they seemed to be sinking deeper every minute.

" 'Taint no use you staying in this darned hole, stranger, if you can plough your way out," was Jimmie's word to the shivering, anxious preacher. "The buckboard's likely here for the night and maybe longer; but I've got to get the team out soon or I'll lose 'em. If you can get out o' this, make your way back to the first trail running West. About forty rod along you'll come to Bill Howe's place. Get him to bring his team and a good rope. Tell him to hustle."

After much plunging and stumbling the preacher managed to gain the level of the roadway and with clothing heavy with water and mud, dragged his way to the Howe ranch.

The bronchos, exhausted with their day's hard drive, seemed unable to make the effort necessary to get to higher ground. They were embedded in mud to the haunches. Jimmie worked away at the harness and unfastened or cut all off but the bridles. He sought in vain to make more solid footing for his team, but with the aid of a piece of charred tree trunk he made a little better slope to the side of the cave-in up which he was endeavouring to get them. He was especially concerned about his favorite driver "Magpie," and by combined shouting and beating he eventually got her to the side of the road and tied her to a poplar while he prepared to do what he could for "Buster."

A few minutes later he heard the rattle of a wagon and Bill Howe and his hired man appeared. With the aid of a rope around his neck and assistance from one of Bill's horses, Buster was at last alongside of Magpie. The two animals gave a peculiar little whinny of pleasure at the reunion.

An examination showed that Buster had corked himself badly in his struggles and the wound would need careful cleansing and bandaging.

Jimmie waded through the mud once more and fastened the rope to the back of the buckboard and it was slowly hauled to higher ground and the trunk transferred to the Howe waggon.

The following day, Jimmie and the missionary, having made arrangements to use Bill Howe's team, continued their journey. Buster's injured fetlock needed rest and care. Bill's horses had frequently made the Crossing and left to themselves would usually pick the best way. The heavier waggon was deemed a safer conveyance than the damaged buckboard.

A detour had to be made to avoid the dangerous bit of roadway and there were many rough and difficult places to get over, but at last they reached the river-bed.

Very slowly and cautiously the horses splashed their way through the deepening water and in several places it seemed as if the men were taking foolish risks in attempting such a trip.

There were anxious moments when the waggon-box touched the water and for a while the men's feet had to be raised to the top of the dashboard. The trunk had to be upended on a couple of blocks and even then became submerged to the extent of two or three inches. The missionary's belongings had been banged and jarred in an apparently most disastrous fashion and now a partial soaking was being added to the probable damage.

He regretted having been persuaded to bring along certain breakables, and especially a jar of black currant jam that his maiden Aunt had felt to be very desirable "for Joey's throat." Hot water added to black currant jam was her favorite remedy for throat trouble.

Every stone they had struck since he left Heathcote suggested the probable wanderings of that jam, and with the addition of a little water it would be likely to travel faster and farther. But the trunk troubles were not yet ended. There had been no thought of tying it to the heavy waggon-box, for it could not move very far in any event, and after it had been upended one of the men had kept a hand on it. Suddenly however a front wheel struck the base of a sloping rock and made the ascent, and in a second or two the men were clinging to the high side of the waggon seat to keep themselves from being pitched into the water. The trunk slid quickly and heavily against the low side and somehow went overboard. The men were too busy trying to save themselves to know just how it happened but they got part of the benefit of the splash and the trunk was gone. The horses responded to Jimmie's yell as the waggon wheel, with a brutal bump, dropped them from the top of the rock to the level again.

The men looked helplessly in the direction of the trunk. "My things will be ruined: I've books and pictures and papers that will be completely spoiled. How can we get it out quickly, Mr. Stevenson?" Jimmie, removing his coat and baring his arm, went to the end of the waggon box. His efforts to move the trunk were unsuccessful. He could just touch it but that was all. He tried to back the horses but they objected to going that way and besides the rock would have prevented. "There aint no way of getting it 'cept to strip off and get in, but a man 'ud pretty nigh freeze if he was in fer long," said Jimmie. It was evident he himself had no particular desire for a bath just then.

The missionary put his coat over the seat, and removed most of his clothing. Never had water looked more uninviting than that rushing muddy stream, but—it was now or never if his "traps" were to be of any use. Jimmie made a few sympathetic remarks as his scantily-clad companion moved nearer to where the trunk lay. One foot was put over the edge of the waggon and into the water, but the temperature caused a quick withdrawal. Two or three other attempts were made and then a foot got as far as the hub of the near wheel. At last with a gasp that could not be suppressed the missionary was standing in the water. But it is one thing to stand in cold water and altogether another thing to stoop low enough to lift an object from the river bottom. It needed several attempts to accomplish it and the missionary's teeth were chattering as Jimmie said afterwards "like one of them there typewriters."

When the trunk was upended near to the wheel Jimmie managed to get hold of the handle and it soon rested in the waggon again. As he followed his damaged belongings the shivering missionary said, "T-h-hat m-man D-d-an at Heathcote t-told me th-the wa-water would be d-darned c-cold and he sp-poke the absolute truth." Jimmie smiled, and knew that for many a day he would be able to entertain all and sundry persons with the story of the preacher's trunk.

When the other side was reached the missionary decided to walk for a while. He rarely used slang but it seemed to relieve his feelings a little as he looked up at Jim on the waggon-box and said: "Sam Hill! this is some trip, believe me."

For nearly two miles he kept ahead of the team, and travelling over rough roads soon brought warmth to the body. The remaining two miles he rode and walked by turns.

At last Jimmie Stevenson pointed ahead to a little curl of smoke that was seen above a small clump of scrubby trees. "Yon's Ronald Cameron's place."

As they turned toward the clearance a boy ran out to let down the poles for the team to enter, and Jimmie drove up to the low unpainted weather-browned house of the Camerons.

It was a humble dwelling with only three small windows. The doorway was so low that a person of average height had to stoop to gain entrance.

The arrival of the new minister caused a good deal of confusion and embarrassment for a few minutes, but Joseph Woods received a genuine welcome to his new field of labour and Mrs. Cameron's kind and motherly manner lightened a good deal of the burden of the day.

The good-natured soul lifted her hands and exhibited the palms in sympathetic astonishment as she heard a part of the story of the new preacher's experience in getting to the Plain.

She bustled around and prepared Aleck's bedroom for the missionary to get on some dry clothes, and with profuse apologies for not having had time to mend some of the articles placed at his disposal she left him to make a change. When he was clothed in Aleck's dry garments he wondered if he looked as uncomfortable as he felt. He explained to a friend sometime after that he was "tickled to death" with Aleck's coarse undergarments.

While Mrs. Cameron prepared the meal, the missionary inspected the contents of his trunk.

When a man is undertaking such a work as that to which Joseph Woods had gone, nothing helps more than to get his room fixed up with the things from home. But the condition of the missionary's belongings was enough to make a man weep. The sealer containing the black currant jam had not been able to stand the mishaps of these eventful days, and with the exception of two compartments in the trunk tray the jam had visited in every direction. Mrs. Cameron shook her head in sympathy but said hopefully: "You just sit in and take a bite such as it is, and I'll do what I can at your things and maybe they won't be so awful bad after all. Get the wash tub, Aleck, and put a few more sticks in the stove, so we'll get a good drying fire."

During the evening the missionary talked over the situation and got all the information possible from the Camerons.

Yes he would have to "bach," for accommodation was the problem they had been unable to solve. No one in the district had a spare room and it had been understood that the preacher would look after himself. Even for "baching" no arrangements had as yet been made and no furnishings were in sight. They informed him that there was a one-roomed shack he could get and that Aleck would drive him to take a look at it after the chores were done the next morning.

A drive of nearly two miles shortly after breakfast the following day brought the missionary to the only building in the whole district that was available for his occupancy. It had once been used as a granary, and was constructed entirely of scantling and light clapboards. There was no glass in the only window, and no fastening to the crudely-made door. One end of the place had no flooring, and at least a dozen gopher holes were in sight. The little grey burrowers peeped out now and again, and having had undisputed possession for so long, uttered their protesting squeak at the presence of the intruders. The place was so dirty and so poorly constructed that it seemed impossible as a place of human abode.

Yet, this was the only shelter provided for one who was engaged in as big and noble a task as the world offers. As he gazed upon the cheerless shack, the young missionary had mingled feelings of anger and disappointment. Was this the best the Church and community could do for one who was giving the choicest years of his life to the service of God and man? Should he put up with it? Was he justified in living half a mile from his nearest neighbours in a building far inferior to many a cattleshed or chicken coop? Surely it was bad enough to be deprived of companionship, or libraries, and of all the social advantages he had formerly had, without putting up with a shack in which a man could scarcely retain his self-respect. This was the twentieth century and it was neither necessary nor desirable that a preacher should so live.

Perhaps Aleck surmised the missionary's thoughts—"It ain't much of a place, but I guess we could help you fix it up a bit. It wouldn't be so awful bad if it was floored all over and got some glass in the window. Guess we could have a 'bee' and clean it up, and stop the roof from leaking. I mind that end was leaking like a sieve one day when I stood inside out of a storm. Maybe we can get some glass that will keep the wind out 'til we can drive to town and get regular panes."

The missionary tried to smile appreciatively, but it was difficult. Aleck noticed it and continued—"The women-folks have been counting on having a preacher for this long time, and they'd be awful sore if you couldn't stay. They're kind o' set on the thing. Kind o' anxious about the kids, I guess. Don't seem right to them for kids to grow up without a church."

At the moment the words had little effect upon the missionary—the difficulties and privations loomed large.

Few people can realize the loneliness, discouragement and discomfort of certain pioneer mission-fields, to the city-bred man who for the first time takes up such work, and it may as well be said here that few people realize the joy that comes to the missionary who has faced it all uncomplainingly, and has entered into the life of the people, and given them unstintingly of his best. Between him and them there exists a singular and blessed attachment, and his visits to some of the scattered settlers are the brightest days of all the year. Many a benediction is pronounced upon the man who listens and counsels, and by Bible message and prayer seeks to bring sustenance to some whose lives are burdened or lonely almost beyond endurance.

After a few minutes silence the missionary replied: "Well, I'm here, and if it's as hard to get out as it was to get in, I shall have to stay for a while anyway, and I'm much obliged for your willingness to help, Aleck. If you think you can get a few of the neighbours to give a hand, why the sooner we get on the job the better."

That night he thought it all over when the household was asleep. For a while he almost convinced himself that life was too short and too precious to be wasted in such a dreary spot, and on so few people. Then, to live so far away from neighbours—could he, and should he endure it? And what a hole to be in in the case of sickness! The nearest doctor forty miles away! Even the thought of the night in such a shell as the one they were planning he should occupy gave him nervous chills. He had never yet slept alone in any house—and to be half a mile from another soul! And then to cook, eat, sleep and study in a place 10 x 14—for that was the measurement Aleck had taken for the flooring. How could he stand it? Then the long and lonely walks and drives, and at the end of the day,—a shack such as that, with the added burden of preparing his own meals when he came home completely "tuckered out."

Then he seemed to see Aleck standing in the doorway of the shack with his head turned from him and saying in a half-apologetic tone, as though the women were the only ones concerned: "They're kind o' anxious about the kids, I guess."

Yes, there were the boys and girls! Growing up in a community without a church—but there were only thirteen, all told! Thirteen boys and girls! What could be done with thirteen?

Many other questions did Joseph Woods ask himself through those night hours, as he lay on a very uncomfortable improvised bed.

Then there came to him a passage that one of the Church's evangelists had given him some years before. He had been troubled about the future, and Proverbs iii:6 had given him confidence: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and

He shall direct thy paths." Had the Divine Hand led him here? He felt that he could say "Yes" to that question. Was it just for a trip to the West God had led him hither? Because difficulties and discomforts had arisen did that prove that he was in the wrong place? Had not the one he called "Master" tried to make clear to his followers that the path would be beset with the very things of which he was complaining? Had not God said "Forward" to His people when obstacles seemed to make any progress impossible? Was he complaining at the smallness of his opportunity? Were thirteen Sunday-school scholars too few for one of his attainments? How many had his Master in His training class by Galilee?

Before day dawned Joseph Woods knew that He who had led him to Cameron's Plain would sustain him there, and he could face the future with courage. Yes, with God's help he would stay. The old Superintendent should have no regrets for sending him into hitherto unoccupied territory.

The day-school scholars carried home the word of the preacher's arrival, and that the first service would be held in the schoolhouse on Sunday at three o'clock.

It was a great Sabbath for the faithful few who had appealed for a missionary. Many a sacred memory was revived as psalm and hymn and prayer and sermon formed part of the worship. The singing was poor from the musical standpoint and to the children there was a strangeness about this their first service that prevented them from taking any part, but the older folk found their voices in "Unto the hills" for "Sandon" was familiar to them all. Little was said, but at the close of worship several went away with thankful and happier hearts.

Joseph Woods kept his promise to his Master and faithfully toiled through the weeks and months although his work was beset with difficulties in many directions. Day by day he came into contact with the scattered settlers and many a soul was the better for the sympathy and help he was able to give.

"Ever been to see the Hermit?" asked Ronald Cameron one day as he met the missionary trudging along the road. "The Hermit? Who's he?"

"Well, he's a queer sort of chap that lives a mile or so back of Dan Taylor's place. Nobody knows anything about him. He sort of dropped in here two or three years ago and don't seem to want anybody to go near him, but maybe you could get him out of his shell a bit if you took him the right way. The only place he goes is to the store at the Corners and he most generally goes there when nobody else is around. Jack

Graham says he wouldn't want a decenter fellow to deal with."

A few days later the missionary located the rarely travelled road leading to the Hermit's abode—a low, log building, almost hidden by weeds and brush. A few articles of clothing were flapping on a line near the back door, and the Hermit, quite unaware of the approach of the visitor, was engaged in the skinning of a rabbit—a job to which he was evidently not accustomed.

A cheery "Good afternoon" from Mr. Woods caused him to look up and a shadow of displeasure crossed his face as he responded with little more than a growl. "It's many a day since I've seen a rabbit skinned," began Mr. Woods, quite ignoring the Hermit's lack of cordiality. "I've chipped the skin off many a one in the Old Country. We counted rabbits quite a delicacy when I was a boy."

"Blamed miserable job," said the Hermit in a surly voice.

"I see you've got two of them. Would you mind if I did the other one?" While asking the question he took his knife from his pocket and picked up the second rabbit. Tying the two hind feet together he hung it on a nail at the side of the building. Quickly he slit the skin on the under side and disposed of everything but the heart. A few other cuts around the feet and he was pulling off the skin almost as easily as one might peel a banana. A cut or two at the head and the skin was in one piece and the job done. The Hermit without a thank you or a smile merely muttered, "I've been at this other blooming thing over an hour." There was a moment's silence and then the missionary said: "My name is Woods; I'm holding services at Cameron's Plain and Shell Creek every Sunday and doing what I can to give a hand through the week. Might I ask your name?"

"A man's name doesn't matter," replied the Hermit surlily.

"Not a particle," said the missionary. "I thought as I was passing I'd just call for a bit of a chat. I like to get acquainted as far as I can. I'd got to get somewhere for a bite of supper and I wondered if I could have it here."

The Hermit for the first time looked squarely into the missionary's face and Joseph Woods burst into a little laugh and said, "Perhaps you admire my cheek, but I'd like to help you cook and eat one of those rabbits. I keep 'bach' myself."

The Hermit with a trifle less churlishness than he had previously manifested, muttered "Come in."

Joseph Woods felt at once that he was in the presence of a man who had formerly lived under very different circumstances and who had for some reason or other deliberately withdrawn himself from his accustomed sphere of life.

The Hermit appeared to be about forty years old. A mass of hair crowned a well-shaped head, and the face, despite its severity, was markedly intelligent.

For the next hour the time dragged heavily. The missionary's questions and remarks were replied to brusquely and briefly. At last everything was ready and the two men sat down to the evening meal.

Although feeling some slight embarrassment at remaining, Joseph Woods felt constrained to try to get a little nearer to this silent man's life.

A picture or two on the wall, a solid leather portmanteau in a corner, a small row of books quite unusual in such a district; what appeared to be a portable organ, a stack of sheet music on a shelf—these things in such a place told Joseph Woods that the Hermit had a "past."

"Is that an organ?" he asked at length.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Well! well! I haven't seen one since I left the East. They tell me there isn't a piano or organ in this whole district. The children around here have never seen one."

In a strangely different voice to his former tone, the Hermit asked slowly and with a slight quiver, "Did you ever hear one played?"

Joseph Woods responded quickly. "Many a time! and I've tried my hand at it occasionally. I like an organ for sacred music rather than a piano. To my mind it expresses the soul better."

"Expresses the soul better; expresses the soul better." The Hermit moved over to the little organ as he repeated the words. "You said you'd heard one played. I wonder if you ever did?" It seemed a peculiar remark at the moment for the tone in which the words were uttered clearly implied that the Hermit had his doubts. As he asked the question he lifted the cover of the instrument and began to play.

Perhaps the surroundings had something to do with it, perhaps the shadows of the evening added their charm, but for almost an hour the missionary listened to music such as he believed he had never before heard. The Hermit seemed to forget the presence of his visitor and Joseph Woods had no intention of disturbing this strangely secretive man as he "expressed his soul." It hardly seemed possible that within so small a compass as a tiny reed organ such expressive and soul-moving harmonies could be brought forth. And as he listened on while twilight deepened into darkness he knew there were great possibilities in the life of this lonely man. He recalled the lines of a great poet:

"Understand Sonora Hinda that the tunes are in me,
They are not in the lute till I put them there."

Through those plaintive chords the Hermit had suggested much that would never have come from his lips.

At length he ceased. Turning round to the missionary he said in a calm, quiet voice, "Music is the medicine of the breaking heart."

When Mr. Woods left the shack the hermit held out his hand. "Drop around again if you care to, but don't bring anybody along, and no need to say anything of what has gone on here to-night."

Ten days later the missionary made his way back to the Hermit's dwelling. The reception, if not cordial, was at least civil, and the Hermit later on invited him to stay the night.

As the night fell Mr. Woods suggested the use of the organ. "Do you sing?" "Sing? Sing?" The words were repeated with the first approach to a laugh—a hard sort of laugh—that the Hermit had given. "Yes, Yes! I did sing once; Drury Lane, Haymarket, Alhambra, Exeter Hall, Royal Albert Hall, Metropolitan, Grand." He added the names of these famous theatres and concert halls with no other comment or explanation.

As long as he lived Joseph Woods never forgot that night of song. It was an experience that more than compensated him for all the privations of those nine months in Cameron's Plain. The best selections from oratorios and operas as well as simpler songs were given with a finish, and skill and power that kept the missionary spellbound. When the singer finished, Joseph Woods put his hand on the Hermit's shoulder and said, "I want you to sing that last song in the schoolhouse next Sunday: it's a sin, a downright sin for you to keep quiet. Give us a lift. I'll call for you and we'll take the organ along."

Donald Cameron could scarcely believe it when the missionary told him the Hermit was going to sing in church service the next Sunday afternoon. "You don't say! You don't say!" he repeated again and again.

And the Hermit kept his word. He was ready for the service when Joseph Woods called. His clothing that Sunday was not the clothing of the backwoods, and his whole bearing was that of a gentleman.

The little schoolhouse was crowded, and the portable organ was almost as much an object of interest and conversation as the Hermit himself. Twice the singer "lifted," as Mr. Woods expressed it, the audience out of themselves "into gladder and holier realms."

For several weeks the Hermit placed his wonderful musical gifts at the disposal of the community and the missionary grew more and more attached to the "queer sort of chap" Donald Cameron had led him to discover.

One cold night as he sat with the Hermit, with only the little light from the front damper of the wood stove reflected upon their faces the lonely man told his story.

He had risen from his seat and felt for a volume on his bookshelf. From below the front cover he took out a photograph and held it to the light at the base of the stove.

"That's the picture of the girl for whom I sang and lived—and have suffered," he added slowly and sadly. The first time I saw her was when we were playing "Tannhauser" in a city in the Midland counties. She had been brought from London to fill the place of one of the leading ladies who had been taken down with pneumonia. She was a favorite understudy of the manager's and she did the part well. She was a bright little creature with one of the merriest laughs you ever heard. She was always elegantly dressed and was one of those girls who knew exactly what to wear and just how to put it on. Most of the men were quick to pay her attention and she was pampered and flattered and entertained by them all.

"To cut the story short I won out, and in less than three months we were married in a Kensington Church. I fixed up a pretty fine apartment in the Bayswater district, as I didn't want her to be on the road unless for some special performance. The theatrical business is a hard life for a young girl, and I wasn't anxious to have her placed in the compromising positions that it's not easy to avoid, especially as there was no place for her in my own company just then.

"But she wanted to keep in touch with the profession, and was keen on getting on to the stage as often as she could. I agreed to her keeping up a couple of parts and to her singing occasionally. Of course I had to be away from home most of the time but I planned dates so as to visit her as often as I could and two or three all-week stands I had her come along. She kept at me to let her go into the business and she had prepared a pretty good "turn" for a good class of vaudeville, but I tried all I could to keep her from it for I didn't want her in it again.

"During the first six months of our married life if I wrote that I'd arrive at Paddington she always met me there, or if I came to one of the more central stations, I'd take the underground to Praed St., which was near the apartments, and she'd have everything fixed up and be right on hand to welcome me.

"Then for a while she wasn't able to meet me, but I went home all the oftener and did what I could to add to her comfort. Over a year went by and each time I returned she seemed to be less glad to see me. I never 'fell' to the things that have ruined hundreds of men in the profession and I was saving all I could, hoping to make her comfortable in a suburban home after a few years. I loved kids and was glad when we had a baby girl, but it seemed to worry her quite a bit, and I felt badly when she told me that she wished the baby hadn't been born as it would interfere too much with her liberty.

"Things dragged on for a year or so and I suppose neither of us had much pleasure in our home life. Perhaps I was to blame—maybe I left her alone too much, but at any rate we seemed to get farther apart and there wasn't the confidence in one another that there should have been. I felt it and yet I could not bring myself to talk it over with her.

"I loved her through it all, but she made so little response to any attentions I paid her that perhaps without intending it I may have grown less considerate than I should have been. Yet I was all the time hoping things would come out right and after life on the road for fifteen years

I looked forward to settling down in a home of our own.

"One day in the early summer I returned at the week-end, having planned a bit of a holiday up in the Windermere district. I thought it would do her and the baby good to take a couple of weeks at one of the lakeside hotels. I had made up my mind to try to get any misunderstandings cleared up and to tell her that after the next season's contract I would take no more engagements that would keep me away from home.

"When I reached the apartment, she was out, but she had left a letter on my desk."

The Hermit was silent for a moment and the missionary glancing up saw painful memories reflected upon his face. In a voice that revealed more emotion than he had yet shown, he continued, "She was gone!—told me married life in an apartment was too tame. Said I had better not try to find her as it would not help matters. I tell you it was staggering news and I could scarcely believe my eyes, when I read that she had left our baby girl in a children's home. She asked me to make what arrangements I wished for the future and reminded me that she never wanted the child and could not be bothered caring for her.

"The next two days were hell for me, and I went around half dazed, scarcely knowing what to do. I had my faults, but God knows I did not deserve that kind of treatment. I was humiliated and angry and decided that I would have to pull out of the old city and get away from everybody. I made arrangements for the proper care of the baby and then booked an ocean passage and from that day for many a month I spoke to no one unless it was an absolute necessity. My heart was hard and hot against everybody. I felt I had been brutally deceived and that I would trust nobody again. It doesn't matter how I got here, but here I am, and the world to me has seemed about as cheerful a place as a hugh graveyard. God only knows what the end of it will be."

With a sigh of despair, the heartsick man pushed his chair over to the table, and resting his head on his forearms, said, bitterly, "Oh, my God, but I am sick of it all!"

Far into the night the two men talked, exchanging such confidences as men only do in hours of darkness.

Joseph Woods said comparatively little, but let the disappointed and forsaken man fully unburden his heavy heart. At times the Hermit's language was bitter and hopeless. "Life," he said, "was nothing but deception and torture and heartbreak."

It was early morning before he suggested retiring. When he did so, Joseph Woods said quietly, "I haven't bothered you much with talk about religion, but I'd like to close the night as we always did at home—with reading and prayer. I suppose you have no objection?" He put his hand to his vest pocket and drew out his testament. "My heart aches for you, and I wish I could help you, but the burden is one you have to carry pretty much alone. I do believe, however, that this little book holds the solution of every man's problems."

The Hermit made no reply and Joseph Woods read a few verses from several different books, closing with the Master's invitation to those who would find rest unto their souls. The brief prayer that followed was tender, with the yearning of one who longed to see his troubled fellow man cast all his care upon God.

As they rose to their feet the Hermit held out his hand, and clasping that of the missionary merely uttered a subdued "Good night." Only two quietly spoken words and a handclasp, but Joseph Woods knew that the Master's words and a human petition had not been uttered in vain.

As he left the lonely dwelling on the following morning, he reminded the Hermit that they were looking forward to another solo on the coming Sunday. "I don't know—perhaps," was all the reply he received.

The following Sabbath when he entered the schoolhouse the Hermit was standing near the door. "Yes, I'll sing, just this once," he whispered in response to the question as to a solo.

To this day the people of Cameron's Plain talk of the Hermit's solo on that Sunday afternoon. It was what some term "only a gospel hymn,"

> "I was a wandering sheep,
> I did not love the fold."

but as the song continued the people seemed to see the weary wanderings of a wayward soul, and the Hermit's voice had in it a pathos if not a penitence that caused Joseph Woods to wipe away tear after tear. Never had he seen a congregation so affected by any song, and ere it closed he experienced that heaven-born thrill that comes to a man when he feels a soul is being re-born. The Hermit came to the last stanza with a vocal triumph that was born of the faith of a wanderer who had turned again home. There was confidence and confession as the closing words rang out,

> "But now I love the Shepards voice,
> I love, I love the fold."

As Joseph Woods shook the hands of the departing congregation, many a quiet word was spoken to him that convinced him of the power of the song. When the Hermit passed out he clasped his hand and in a low voice said fervently, "God bless you. You preached a greater sermon than I ever could."

Topics of conversation were not numerous in Cameron's Plain, and all that week the Hermit's song was spoken of throughout the entire district. Those who were not present were convinced something wonderful had taken place, and in anticipation of a repetition the schoolhouse on the next Sunday was packed as never before. To the disappointment of all, the Hermit was not present.

Joseph Woods planned to visit him ere many days had passed, for he felt assured that the song was the beginning of a new day for the heartsore occupant of the isolated shack.

Calling at the postoffice for his weekly mail on the following day, he received one letter in unfamiliar handwriting. It was from a town two hundred miles away. This is what he read:

> "Dear Mr. Woods, by when you receive this, I shall be several hundred miles away and it is unlikely we shall ever meet again. It is not easy for a man of my type to acknowledge his folly, but you have helped me to see life differently. Keep at your job.

You are putting up a good game. I'd like you to have the little organ. You may find use for it in your meetings. I hated to leave it behind, for it was my only friend through many a lonely day. If there is anything else in the shack that you can use, please take it. I shall be glad to have you dispose of the other things as you see best. As I wanted to slip away quietly, I am giving you this trouble. It was cowardly and cruel of me to leave my baby girl, and I am going back, God helping me, to do my duty as a father—and who knows but Madge may yet return and complete the home I am going to make. You prayed for me one night, will you keep it up? Please remember also Madge and the little girl.

Yours gratefully,

H. J. S."

Joseph Woods drove to the Hermit's shack early the following morning. Things were much as on his former visits except that a heap of ashes outside showed that books and papers had been burned. He searched in vain for something that would reveal the Hermit's identity. In the middle of the table on a slip of paper so placed as to indicate that it was intended for his perusal were these words:—

"Though I forget Him, and wander away,
Still He doth love me wherever I stray.
Back to his dear loving arms would I flee,
When I remember that Jesus loves me."

The stanza was part of a hymn used just preceding the Hermit's last solo in the schoolhouse. It seemed probable that its appeal had reached the Hermit's heart and that he had voiced his response in the never-to-be-forgotten solo, and subsequently had carried out his decision by returning to seek those for whom he had "sung, and lived, and suffered."

CHAPTER XVI

THE MAKING OF ROSS K.

THE general Superintendent of Home Missions had visited the college and had made one of his heart-stirring appeals for winter supply in a particularly lonely and needy district. To lose a term at College was farthest from Henry Weaver's desire, but after the old Doctor's appeal he had offered to do it, and now for three days he had been travelling with intermingled hope and fear to take up the work to which he had been appointed. At midnight he was due to arrive at a certain insignificant flag-station. Shortly after twelve o'clock the brakeman came through the car to tell him that in a few minutes the train would be at Lorimo. "We may not come to a dead stop, 'cause it's an up-grade, and the engineer likes to keep going, but he'll slow up enough for you to get off."

The two men stood on the platform as the train drew near to a station that seemed little larger than a piano-box. "This is Lorimo. Can you make the jump? There's a bit of platform right here—better get a move on and you'll hit it." The student made the jump in safety. The brakeman swung his lantern and the engineer answered the signal. With the rear lights of the train rapidly rushing away from him, the missionary stood in the lonely, lifeless clearance, never having felt more absolutely alone.

A moment or two later he heard the jingle of a bell and then a voice asking if he was the new preacher. "I dasn't leave my hoss: guess you can make for here all right."

After a cold five-mile drive he was shown his sleeping quarters in a pioneer's shack. In the morning he awakened from a deep sleep with agitated feelings. He had a hazy sort of idea that something fearful was taking place. There were strange noises that might suggest anything from a fire to a murder. Later on he discovered it was the regular accompaniment to the waking and arising of the ten children. His new boarding house presented a fine opportunity in which to begin his home mission work.

The little folks enjoyed the novelty of having a preacher board with them, and when his trunk arrived the following day the unpacking was an occasion of wonderful interest. During later days there was much inspection of his possessions, especially when he was absent on his visiting tours. His room door had no such safeguard as a lock, and one day in the absence of the father and mother he returned to find the children greatly enjoying a procession, each attired in one or more of his garments. Many of his illustrated books still contain pencilled additions by the little artists of that home.

The missionary's territory was extensive and involved long walks and drives. Although he tramped continuously it was nearly three months before he had visited all the settlers under his pastoral care.

On one occasion, planning to visit a log schoolhouse where there was an attendance of ten or twelve children he asked a lad in the home some questions regarding the school. "Is your teacher a lady or a gentleman?" "Tain't neither," was the reply. "It's just Margaret Stewart." Margaret happened to be the daughter of a well-known settler and so could not qualify for any such classification as the missionary's question suggested.

It was in the school mentioned that a staunch old Scotch preacher undertook some catechizing. The missionary had not been "strong" on the Shorter Catechism, and the old gentleman discovered it when he questioned the boys and girls, and thereafter administered kindly reproof. When however he started in this particular school things seemed more hopeful. "I wonder," he began, as he rubbed his hands together, "if any little boy or girl knows the catechism?" There was no response, so he continued. "Well, perhaps you can answer the first question: "What is the chief end of man?" A dirty hand shot up and waved for his attention. "Ah! here is a little boy who knows: stand up my boy and give the class the answer." With a clear-voiced confidence the boy answered, "Please sir, it's the head end."

No Sunday Schools had ever been held until the missionary's coming, and the settlers being few and far between it was not easy to get them started.

It was late spring before the one was commenced to which Ross K. came. Ross and his brother never missed a Sunday. They came from a very poor and a very dirty home almost four miles from the tiny building where the service was held. The missionary became greatly interested in these two attentive, obedient, respectful boys, and pitied them because of their surroundings.

About three months before he was to return to College a lady living in an Eastern city wrote asking if he knew of any poor parents who would be willing to send their boy East for an education. Having no children of their own she and her husband would give such a boy a home and would meet all the financial requirements. At once the missionary's thoughts were turned to Ross and his brother, and he resolved to see the parents and discuss with them the offer he had received. Early the following morning he started his journey. It was late in the afternoon before he reached the wretched home. The father had gone to the village and would not likely be back until dark.

There were only a few places in the district where the student felt it impossible to eat or sleep and this was one of them. He therefore decided that he could not wait for the father's return, but must talk the matter over with the mother.

There were seven children in the home—three of them seemed almost babies, and the two oldest were the boys who attended the Sunday School. All the children were dirty and untidy and the mother seemed to have lost heart and interest and just dragged herself languidly along from day to day. "You must excuse the place, sir," she said, as she wearily kicked into a corner from various parts of the floor, articles of clothing that were little better than so many filthy rags. "I can't keep up to the work any more. What with the children, and the chores, and the cow, and me sick most of the time, I am not equal to it." She seated herself dejectedly on a rough bench and rested her elbows on the table.

"If it wasn't for the children I'd be glad to die right now. You think it is wrong of me to say that do you? God knows it's time I had a rest somewhere: I'll never get it here! Ten years! O God! the loneliness of most of them! I married in the East," then in a low and bitter voice she said, "I'm one of those who married in haste, and Heaven knows I've repented for well nigh ten years. I thought I was marrying a man —I married a brute. Maybe you know his nationality—anyhow it doesn't matter. It's many a day since I've been able to laugh. Here I am buried alive fifteen hundred miles from any relative. I just couldn't and I daren't have any of my people come out here, and I have neither money nor clothing to get East, and anyhow I couldn't leave the children. I saw you looking at my skirt when you came in. Never mind apologizing about it. When I asked him to buy me just one dress, he said—'Go to ——, do you think I'm made of money?' The only way I could keep clothes was to cut up some flour sacks. Nobody comes near me, and maybe they're not to blame. But it's hard to bear all the same. You see he's ugly to most everybody, and people know I get all the more abuse if they come around. I haven't seen even a neighbour since the baby came two months ago. Mrs. Ramsey was here to help me for two days—that's all.

"Oh, I know I shouldn't be telling all this, but I can't help it. Sometimes I feel as if I could kill myself, and get it finished quickly instead of this slow process. But then sometimes I try to think that things will get better some day—maybe when the children grow up—or maybe in another world. If I thought this was all my life was to be I think I should go mad.

"Maybe you wouldn't think it, but in Ontario in my younger days I was active in home missionary work. Many a box and bale I've helped pack for the 'pioneer fields.' I never thought I'd be among the 'needy pioneers.' The missionaries we've had haven't come near us very much. Maybe the neighbours warn them to stay away, and I know it's hard to get here in the fall or spring. You see this is a blind road, and no one but him and the children uses it from Martin's as far as here."

One of the children lying on the floor started crying so loudly that further conversation was impossible for a few minutes. When the mother took the child in her arms the missionary saw the cause of the outcry. The little one was repulsively scrofulous and the face badly swollen by abscesses. Evidently no special effort had been made to bring relief. "Last night," said the mother, "she cried something awful and she must have had a lot of pain—it seems to come on suddenly—a sort of throbbing, then sometimes she shivers quite a bit." The missionary's heart was touched at the sight of the poor little sufferer. He promised to get some linseed-meal from town and in the meantime the mother was glad to follow his instructions in the use of bran poultices. "The larger abscess seems to be near pointing," said the missionary, "and needs to be lanced. Could you not get her to the doctor?" Tears filled the mother's eyes: "Oh, I'd hate to have her poor little cheek cut; and then I'm not fit to go anywhere, sir, and he" (meaning her husband) "wouldn't take her." She pressed the dirty suffering child nearer to her shoulder and with mingled bitterness and tenderness said, "My poor little Mary—she has had a hard time ever since she came."

"But something must be done to relieve the poor child," was the reply. "How far away is the nearest doctor?"

"Seventeen miles, sir."

"I'll see him to-night or in the morning," said the missionary. "Perhaps he has some calls in this direction and could come soon." The mother feared the husband's wrath if any expense were incurred, but the missionary whose heart was a good deal larger than his pocketbook assured her that he would look after that.

Before leaving, he referred to the Eastern friends who wanted the opportunity of educating a worthy boy from a district where educational advantages were few. He knew no boy who was more deserving than Ross and his conduct and interest at the Sunday School had made him feel there was a hopeful future for the lad if only he could get a fair chance. Did she think Ross would be willing to go, and would they be willing to let him.

The very thought was at first impossible. Burdened as she was and overburdened with children as a stranger might think her to be the loss of one could not be considered, and yet, as the missionary talked she asked herself what chance the boys had where they were. Even the pain of the separation should and must be borne if it would give Ross a fair chance. And surely, she told herself, she could suffer still a little more if only her boy could be given an opportunity to be properly educated amid decent surroundings. Perhaps an answer could be given to the missionary the next time he called.

The shadows of evening were falling when the visitor left the shack, but he determined to get as far on his way to the doctor's as possible. Travelling however was necessarily slow, for even at the best season the roads were rough. The painworn face of the little child continued to make its appeal as the darkness deepened and he decided to make the whole journey and reach the doctor that night. When he arrived the doctor was out, but an hour later the much travelled buggy drew up at the office door. Two or three patients received attention first. Then the doctor nodded to the missionary to enter the consultation room. Although very weary he greeted the missionary kindly and spoke appreciatively of the mission work being done in the outlying districts. Constant acquaintance with suffering had not dulled his sympathy, and he listened patiently to the missionary's narrative, of the condition of the child in the wretched home seventeen miles away. "Yes, certainly, I'll go, Mr. Weaver, although I'm driven nearly to death. Still I'll manage it somehow. There should be another doctor in this district. I've tried to persuade someone to come here, but it's too out-of-the-way for most of the young fellows, and the drives are too long for an older man. It seems a hard thing to admit, but several people who died around here this last year might be living yet if they could have received proper medical attention. I simply couldn't get around to them all. There was one week during the epidemic that I scarcely closed an eye. I do my best, but we all have our physical limitations. If I have another fall and winter like the last I'll be beneath the sod myself.

"How would you like to drive out with me to-morrow? I've several calls to make, but we'll take the team and we could probably get out to see your youngster early in the afternoon and get back here for supper. We'll be glad to have you stay here to-night and we can get a fairly early start in the morning."

About mid-afternoon on the following day they reached the home of the Kazakoffs. The father hearing of their coming had purposely left the family alone. The sad-eyed mother could not greet them gladly for she was timorous and anxious about her little Mary. The doctor examined the shrinking child as the mother held her on her knee. He stepped back to his case and took out a lance. With a sigh he whispered to the missionary "I still hate to cause a child pain, but that's a terrible face, and it's the only thing that will bring quick relief." He held the child a moment on his knee. There was a piercing cry from the little one—a cry that brought more tears to the mother's eyes—and the doctor wiped off the lanced but relieved cheek, and with a tenderness that was beautiful to the onlooking missionary, he helped to make little Mary comfortable. With a doll that he brought from his pocket and placed in her hand, the child for the first time in many days fell into untroubled sleep. After a few words of direction as to the care of Mary and some kindly enquiries and suggestions as to the mother's own health, the doctor prepared to leave. The mother hesitatingly asked the missionary about the bill. "That is settled, Mrs. Kazakoff—there is no need to think of it at all. What about Ross," he continued. "Did you speak to his father?"

"Yes, sir, I did, and I believe he'll let him go"—then with something approaching a sob, she added, "if only I can bring myself to spare him."

Several visits were made to the poor and dirty shack during the next six weeks, and at last it was all arranged that little Ross should go East with the missionary in September.

It was a most interesting experience for the boy. He stood with the missionary at the flag station, and the approaching train was the first he had ever seen. He had no trunk to check, a small newspaper parcel containing all he possessed, except the shabby suit he wore. The journey brought increasing wonder to the little traveller. He had never before seen village, town or city; so that gas, electric lights and street cars were alike new and wonderful.

At last they reached the Eastern city which was to be his new home. His benefactor greeted him with such a sunshiny welcome that the missionary felt he could safely leave his young fellow traveller in the care of this new-found friend.

* * * * *

Ten years passed by. The student missionary, now an ordained minister, was preaching one Sabbath in an Ontario town. At the close of the morning service a young man came to the platform and asked, "Do you remember me?"

"Your face is somewhat familiar," was the reply, "but I imagine it is many years since I saw you last."

"My name is Ross K——." The minister could scarcely believe that the little palefaced lad of the pioneer shack had developed into the attractive young man who stood before him.

"So you know Ross do you?" asked an elder who had overheard some of the conversation. "Yes, I knew him many years ago."

"Well, sir," was the elder's reply, "we are all proud of Ross. I wish we had many more like him. He's the same clean, upright, manly fellow in business and on the ballground as he is in the church. He's as straight as a British Columbia pine."

When the minister met Ross for a chat the next day, they talked of the former days and of the Sunday School in the old schoolhouse.

"What an influence a few words may be in a boy's life, sir! I wonder if you remember the verses we used to learn in the Sunday School? One of them has stuck to me all through my life. We used to say it almost every Sunday—'In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.' I have not always succeeded, but I have tried in the main to follow that counsel, and it has made me whatever of good I am. It was a great thing you did for me when you found me the friends who gave me an education, but after all you did a greater thing when you taught me the principles that have guided me in the proper use of it."

The preacher to whom Ross spoke never sees a missionary envelope and never makes his own contribution without feeling that such a gift may be helping to give some boy like Ross his God-intended chance.

THE END

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